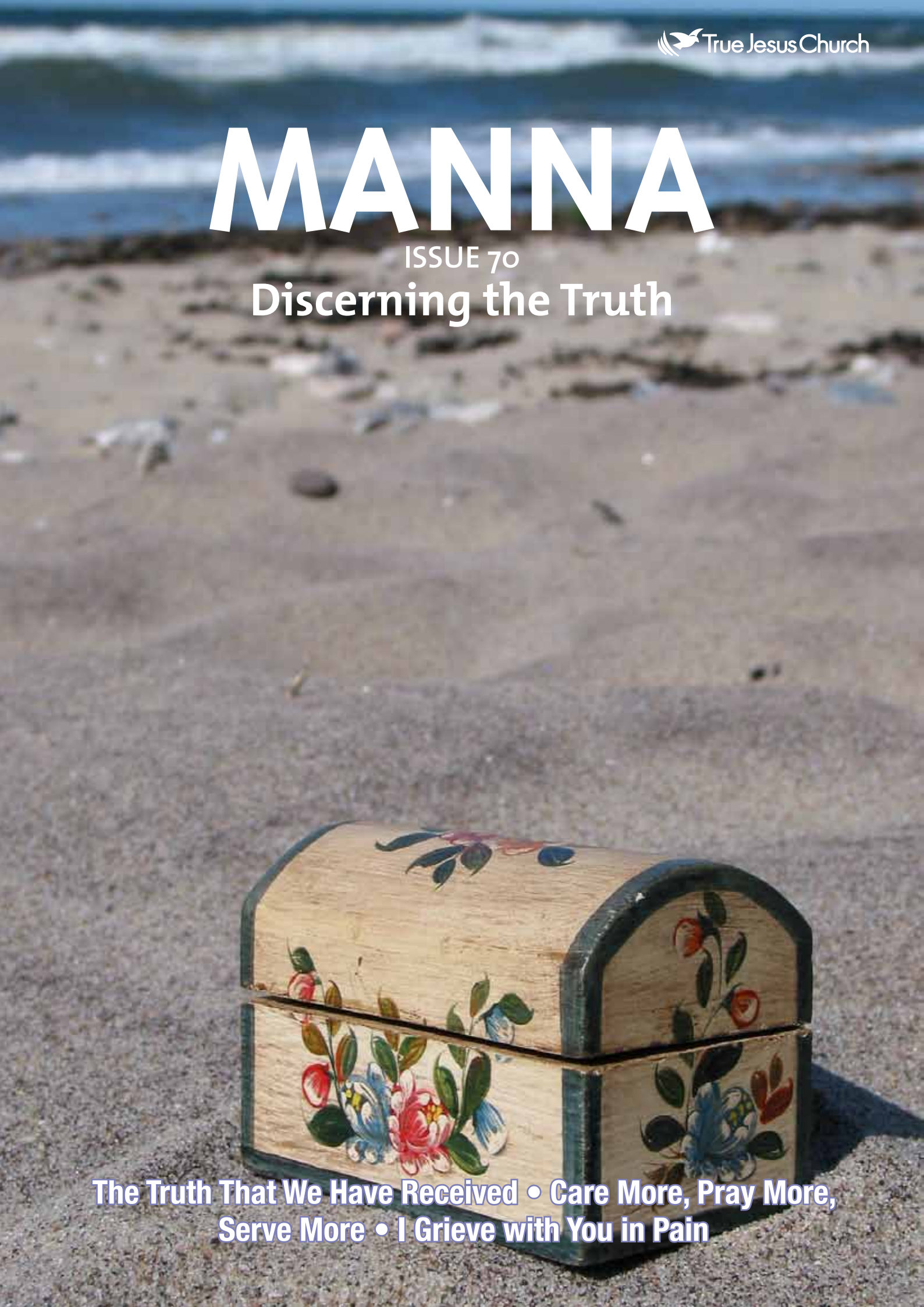
True Jesus Church

MANNA

ISSUE 70

Discerning the Truth



The Truth That We Have Received • Care More, Pray More, Serve More • I Grieve with You in Pain

"The goal of Manna is to inspire believers to live an active faith through mutual encouragement and the study of biblical truths."

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Discerning the Truth

EDITORIAL

The Prophetic Word Confirmed

by Peter Shee

"And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts." (2 Pet 1:19)

The line between truth and error seems to obscure with time, but only because human understanding changes over time. Post-modernism seeks to demolish the very foundation of knowledge—the recognition that absolute truth exists—and is thus incompatible with theistic belief and the self-revelation of God.

When faith in any of the sixty-six books of the Bible is undermined, man cannot arrive at an accurate understanding of God. Even though God is revealed in physical creation (Rom 1:20), without the Holy Scriptures, no one can be "wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 3:15). Historically, deviant sects like the Montanists denied the Old Testament as inspired, while the New Testament, especially Pauline writings, was rejected by Judaistic Christians and certain Gnostics. In recent times, Bart Ehrman, an American New Testament scholar and author of "Misquoting Jesus," refreshes some of the ancient objections to the New Testament and continues with his own disparagement.

In his second epistle, Peter defended the inspired nature of the New Testament, still in the process of writing and compilation, linking it to the inspiration of the Old Testament: because Old Testament Scriptures are inspired, they must never be interpreted according to personal whim but in light of the revelation given to the apostles through Christ. Hence, New Testament teachings are not "cunningly devised fables" but "prophetic word confirmed" (2 Pet 1:16–21). In the same spirit, Peter vindicated his fellow apostle Paul at the end of the epistle, placing Pauline writings on the same level of inspiration as "the rest of the Scriptures" (2 Pet 3:15–16). Paul's teachings were not new inventions, but truth received from the Lord (1 Cor 11:23).

Speaking of the truth that we have received, a theme writer emphasizes the inseparability between God and His word—because God Himself is the truth—leading to the logical conclusion that truth is eternal and unchanging. The progressive nature of revelation (Heb 1:1–2) cannot be seen as change in truth as we transition from the Old to the New Testament, for God and His word are immutable (Heb 6:13–18). Another contributor to the theme warns that false prophets will arise within the true church, who will first misrepresent our traditional beliefs, then attack the twisted version thus presented, paving the way to subvert what we truly teach. These are matters that concern every member of the church. Doctrines regarding the Holy Spirit, inspiration and finality of the Bible, and the unchanging nature of truth are but some of the things currently under attack.

Satan's old trick of causing disharmony and the nature of Satan himself as a fallen creature are examined in the exhortation section. While the first article posits that love is indispensable in ensuring harmony, it observes that the love between Adam and Eve was broken as a result of disobedience to God's word and that fellowship amongst workers is based on commonality of faith. The second article, on the fall of Satan, affirms the absoluteness of God, expounding on the meaning of the tetragrammaton—YHWH—that God is the only self-existing Being. The age-old issue of theodicy—reconciling the justice and mercy of the Almighty with the existence of evil—cannot be resolved by appealing to the idea of a self-existing devil.

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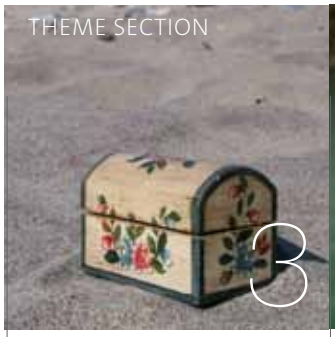

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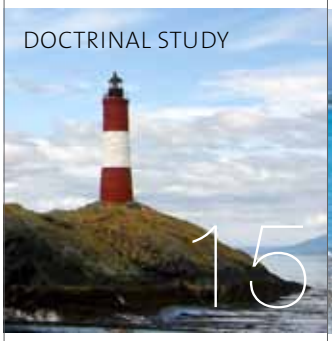

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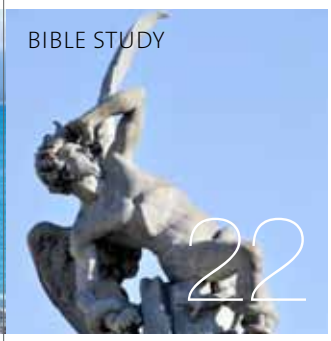

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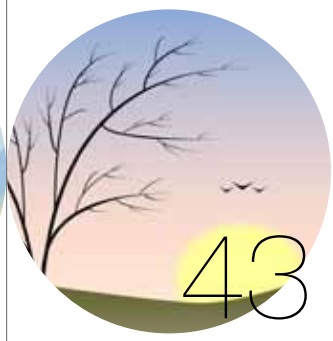

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Discerning the Truth

The Truth That We Have Received

Jonathan Chou—Hillsborough, New Jersey, USA

Truth is absolute, unchanging and eternal (2 Cor 1:18–20; 2 Tim 2:13). The ancient saints adored the truth. For example, the psalmist proclaimed: "Teach me Your way, O Lord; I will walk in Your truth" (Ps 86:11). He also said: "Take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, for I have hoped in Your ordinances. So shall I keep Your law continually, forever and ever" (Ps 119:43–44).

DEFENDING THE TRUTH

When Jesus was being tried, Pilate asked Him, "What have you done? Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice" (Jn 18:37–38). Jesus died protecting the truth.

The apostles were also committed to upholding the truth. Paul charged Timothy: "Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us" (2 Tim 1:13–14). Moreover, he told the Galatians: "If anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed" (Gal 1:6–9).

THE TRUTH AS REVEALED BY GOD

God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4). This is why since ancient times, God has at various times and in various ways committed His oracles to the prophets (Rom 3:2). He also revealed to His apostles and prophets that which was not known in other ages: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs with the Jews, and similarly partake of His promise in Christ through the gospel (Eph 3:5–6). For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, and this gospel has come to the world and is bringing forth fruit (Tit 2:11; Col 1:6).

As Apostle John testified: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (Jn 1:14, 16–17).

God's Word Is Truth (Jn 17:17)

God's word is settled in heaven and lasts for eternity; it is the everlasting and unchanging truth (Ps 119:89). God is the Word, and by the word of the Lord, the heavens were made. For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast (Ps 33:6, 9). Furthermore, He upholds all things by the word of His power (Heb 1:2–3).

As previously mentioned, God spoke in the past to the fathers by the prophets, at various times and in various ways (Heb 1:1). There were those who harbored an evil heart of unbelief and departed from the living God (Heb 3:12). However, the chosen ones, because of their belief,

God's word is settled in heaven and lasts for eternity; it is the everlasting and unchanging truth (Ps 119:89).

obtained a good testimony through their faith. As a result, God has prepared a city for them—a better, heavenly country (Heb 11:16).

The Holy Bible is the word of God; it is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Ps 119:105). It is food for our spirit (Ps 19:7–10). Paul told Timothy that the Holy Scriptures were able to make him wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim 3:15). The Lord Jesus said, "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me" (Jn 5:39).

We should not forget that whatever things were written before were written for our learning (Rom 15:4). The word spoken through angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward (Heb 2:2). Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness" (Heb 3:7–8). Paul reminds us that the Israelites were punished for their evil deeds, and that they serve as examples and warnings for us (1 Cor 10:11).

The Lord Jesus Is the Truth (Jn 14:6–14)

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (Jn 1:1–2). We know that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us; this was Jesus Himself (Jn 1:14, 18). This is indeed a great mystery (1 Tim 3:16; Heb 2:2–3). How great our God is, that He became flesh and dwelt among us! From a human perspective, He looked like a mere man, yet He had the authority and power of God. He came in order to save man and to be the only Savior of mankind (Jn 20:30–31; Acts 4:12). As the Lord Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (Jn 14:6).

Remember that we were once Gentiles in the flesh and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus we have been brought near by the blood of Christ on the cross and have become His children, receiving the abundance of life, partaking and enjoying the grace of the kingdom of heaven (Eph 2:11–13; Rom 5:11).

In the past, the chosen people did not receive the Word with faith, so they could not enter His rest. Today, if we neglect so great a salvation, we will surely drift away. This salvation was first spoken of by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by the apostles and prophets. God also bore witness to this, both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit (Heb 2:1–4; 4:1-2).

The Spirit Is Also the Truth (1 Jn 5:6–7)

The truth and the Spirit are one, and the word of God is the sword of the Spirit. Only the word that is in line with the truth enables one to receive the Holy Spirit; the Spirit can also help one to understand the truth (Eph 6:17; 1:13; Jn 14:16–17). The Lord Jesus told His disciples: "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth" (Jn 16:13).

Paul also said: "In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance" (Eph 1:13–14).

Some people think that as long as they possess good academic qualifications, have a wealth of knowledge, or are proficient in the original Biblical languages, they would be able to understand the Holy Bible in-depth. Little do they know that God often hides these things from those who think themselves wise and prudent, such that "they always go astray in their heart," and they do not know God's ways (Heb 3:10). They may see, but they do not understand; God only reveals these things to those who are humble like babes (Mt 11:25–26; Mt 13:13–15).

"The whole vision has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one who is literate, saying, 'Read this, please.' And he says, 'I cannot, for it is sealed.' Then the book is delivered to one who is illiterate, saying, 'Read this, please.' And he says, 'I am not literate.'"
(Isa 29:11–12)

Although Paul was knowledgeable, he did not dare to declare the great mystery of God with excellence of speech or of wisdom. Instead, Paul spoke in words that the Holy Spirit taught, explaining and comparing spiritual things with spiritual (1 Cor 2:1–2, 11–13). He clearly understood that no man "knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him. Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God" (1 Cor 2:10–11).

The Consistency of the Truth

Truth transcends space and time and is always consistent. For example, after Adam was created, he was tempted and sinned. However, because of the saving grace that was accomplished through Jesus on the cross, all mankind were redeemed from sin, and regained their glorious hope and identity as God's children.

The Old Testament accounts of God clothing Adam with the skin of animals, Abel offering the firstborn of the flock and its fat, Noah offering clean animals as a burnt offering, Moses offering sacrifices to God on Mount Sinai and using the blood of cattle and sheep to make a covenant with God's people are consistent with the truth that points to the cross of Christ's salvation. In addition, the

sprinkling of the blood of cattle and sheep onto the bodies of the people, Noah's flood, and the Israelites' crossing of the Red Sea, all prefigure the receiving of the forgiveness of sins through baptism by immersion (1 Pet 3:21; 1 Cor 10:1–2).

Before the priest administered at the altar, he had to first wash himself with water, anoint himself with oil and change into a new robe. This tells us that one who wishes to draw near to God must first accept water baptism, receive the Holy Spirit, and be born again before he is eligible to serve the Lord and offer himself as a living sacrifice (Lev 8:6–13; Acts 2:37–39).

The Old Testament laws, including the sacrificial rituals, the dietary rules, health regulations, rules for cleansing, feasts of the New Moon, and so on, are a shadow of the good things to come, not the realities themselves. The New Testament is the ultimate reality, of which Jesus Christ Himself is the embodiment (Rom 10:4; Heb 10:1; Col 2:17; Mt 5:17–18).

Hence, we can see that the chosen people of the Old Testament and the disciples of the New Testament were all looking forward to the salvation of Jesus Christ (Jn 8:56). "The first man Adam became a living being. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor 15:21–22, 45).

The author of Hebrews enumerated the heroes of faith of the past and came to the following conclusion: "And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us" (Heb 11:39–40).

GOD'S PURPOSE IN REVEALING THE TRUTH

To Lead Man to Salvation (Ps 25:5)

Moses said: "The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away" (Ps 90:10). Our life on earth is indeed short and filled with sorrow. Yet God promises us eternal life in the kingdom of God if we accept His word. As the apostle Peter has said: "Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, because all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever. Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you (1 Pet 1:23–25).

God has revealed the truth to us through His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (Jn 3:16). Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, giving us an abundant and beautiful life and a living hope. And the end of our faith is the salvation of our souls (1 Pet 1:3–4, 9).

As the Lord Jesus Himself has said, "I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. … I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (Jn 10:9–10).

Paul understood the role to which God had called him—he was to be a minister to the Gentiles according to the stewardship from God, and to preach the whole truth as revealed by God. Therefore, he encouraged himself, telling himself that he was to warn every man and teach every man in all wisdom, that every man might be presented perfect in Christ Jesus (Col 1:25, 28).

To Sanctify Man and Set Him Free (Jn 17:17)

Paul spoke of his diligence and blamelessness in observing the law before he received the grace of salvation. Yet his conscience always pricked him: "For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. … I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice." This was because he was "carnal, sold under sin" (Rom 7:14–19). But he thanked God that through Jesus Christ our Lord he was able to escape from sin, for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus had made him free from the law of sin and death (Rom 8:2).

Those who commit sin are slaves to sin. The whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one; all who live in the world sin and are slaves to sin (1 Jn 5:19). But the Lord Jesus said to the Jews who believed in Him: "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (Jn 8:31–32).

We have been called by the Lord and live under His grace; sin shall no longer have dominion over us. As long as we set our minds on the things of the Spirit and act in obedience to the Spirit, presenting our bodies as instruments of righteousness to God, we will surely triumph over evil, lust and the world. Our lives will be transformed and renewed; we shall bear the fruit of the Spirit and gradually become sanctified (Rom 7:18–25, 6:11–14; Gal 5:22–23).

To Set the Standard of Judgment (Rom 2:2, 8)

The truth is God's standard of judgment (Rom 2:6), and there is no partiality with Him. He will surely render to each one according to his

Those who commit sin are slaves to sin....But the Lord Jesus said...: "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (Jn 8:31–32).

deeds, and will grant eternal life to those who, by patient continuance in doing good, seek for glory, honor, and immortality (Rom 2:7), while those who do not believe the truth but have pleasure in unrighteousness will be condemned (2 Thess 2:12).

The Lord Jesus affirmed that we shall be judged by His words. He said: "I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day" (Jn 12:47–48). Jesus also said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. … Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock" (Mt 7:21, 24–25).

In addition, James tells us that it is not enough to simply listen to the word; we ought to put what we hear into practice: "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only", for such "will be blessed" in what they do. God's word is like a mirror, reflecting our imperfections. We need to look into this mirror and change ourselves, gradually becoming holy and complete, without spot and blemish, so that we will be able to face our Lord in peace (Jas 1:21–25; 2 Pet 3:14).

THE TRUTH AS RECEIVED BY THE TRUE JESUS CHURCH

Paul tells us that the church is the house of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim 3:15). He has also said that the church is the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone (Eph 2:19–20).

The True Jesus Church was established by the Holy Spirit Himself, which shows that the doctrines of our church have their origins in God's revelation. This is similar to the case of Paul: the gospel preached by him also came through the revelation of Jesus Christ (Gal 1:11–12).

The True Jesus Church has always adopted a very cautious attitude in examining the truth and has always judged matters based on the Bible. In the history of the church, there have been disagreements with our church doctrines, resulting in strong challenges and even contradictory claims, but those that lacked biblical support or were inconsistent with the truth have disappeared into oblivion like a gust of wind.

GUARDING AGAINST FALSE TEACHINGS AND DEFENDING THE TRUTH

Recognizing the Ploys of the Devil

The Bible says: "The devil…was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it" (Jn 8:44).

In ancient times, Satan used the serpent to deceive Eve, deliberately twisting and changing God's words. God told Adam, "…of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen 2:17). But the serpent said, "You will not surely die" (Gen 3:4) and added, "For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:5). Satan, on the one hand, changed God's words, and on the other, deliberately sowed discord between man and God. This caused Eve to lose faith in the words of God and led her to fall into temptation. This is the ploy Satan usually uses to deceive people.

During the last days of the apostolic church, the devil seized the opportunity to sow tares among the wheat through false teachers and false apostles, who preached heresies and adulterated the word of God. For example, they taught that Gentile believers had to be circumcised and keep the law, forbade marriage and commanded people to abstain from certain foods. They also preached many other heretical teachings that appeared to be true but were not (cf. Acts 15:1; 1 Tim 4:1–3; 2 Tim 2:18). Paul encouraged the elders at Ephesus, "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock… [for] savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves" (Acts 20:28–30).

Distinguishing Between True and False Teachings

Our Lord Jesus repeatedly reminded the disciples that in the end times, false christs and false prophets would rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect (Mt 24:4–5, 24). The apostles also repeatedly warned: "… that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of

The truth is God's standard of judgment (Rom 2:6), and there is no partiality with Him. He will surely render to each one according to his deeds.

perdition" (2 Thess 2:3). Moreover, the Spirit has expressly said "that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Tim 4:1).

In times when heretical teachings prevail, the saints must weigh carefully what is said so that they themselves are not confused. Apostle John encourages us, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 Jn 4:1). Below are some basic principles we can use to distinguish between truth and heresy.

(1) Is it in accordance with the Bible?

The Bible is the word of God and is the only standard by which to judge right from wrong. Any gospel other than the gospel that was preached by the apostles is heresy (Gal 1:6–9). Men should seek the law and the testimony; if they do not speak according to God's word, it is because there is no light in them (Isa 8:20).

"Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. … If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds." (2 Jn 9–11)

(2) How does it view the true church?

The true church was established by the Holy Spirit. It possesses the full gospel of salvation and is the ark of the last days. This is an indisputable truth, as explained earlier. If what is preached is truth, it will surely be at one with the beliefs of the true church, and will surely be at one with us in spirit (Jn 10:16). Even in Satan's kingdom, there is no division and dispute (Mt 12:25–26); what more, then, for truth which originates from the same Holy Spirit? Can truth be at odds with itself? (Eph 4:3–4; 1 Jn 2:19; 1 Cor 14:32–33). Apostle John said, "We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us" (1 Jn 4:6).

(3) Redeeming the lost sheep with love

"And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will." (2 Tim 2:24–26)

The church applies certain procedures and principles in dealing with teachings that are contrary to the truth. There is no room for compromise when distinguishing right from wrong. However, we should admonish and exhort in love those who have wandered from the truth, pray for them and try to restore them. Moreover, we should consider ourselves lest we too be affected. Judas betrayed the Lord out of his greed for money, yet the Lord Jesus never ceased to warn and exhort him; He even washed his feet and tried His best to turn him back. But Judas refused to turn back and in the end, Jesus could only say to him, "What you do, do quickly" (Jn 13:27). We also ought to play our part and try to restore the lost ones, then entrust them to God and pray for the Lord's mercy. For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth (2 Cor 13:8).

Let us, therefore, build up ourselves on our most holy faith, pray in the Holy Spirit, keep ourselves in the love of God, and look for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life (Jude 20–21). Amen. ★

Every Good Tree Bears Good Fruit

K.C. Tsai—Toronto, Canada

THE DECEPTION

"Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" (Gen 3:1)

"Are you sure that God said something like this?"
Satan's deceiving words are cunning and often well-packaged. He does not need to oppose God's decree directly. That would be too easy for us to ward off. Instead, he asks questions to successfully disguise a complete heresy or a misquotation. In Eve's case, Satan knew exactly what God had said but simply asked a question to cause confusion and subtly twist God's word.

"We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die' " Eve replied (Gen 3:2–3).

God did not forbid Adam and Eve to touch any fruit. When we fail to listen attentively to God's word, we will easily misunderstand His commandments. God only said, "… for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen 2:17). Eve's exaggerated quotation of God's command revealed her discontent. She seemed to be yearning for something she could not have. Provoked by Satan's question, she eventually fell into his trap and sinned against God.

We see another ploy of Satan when he tempted Jesus to jump off the pinnacle of the temple. Satan quoted Psalms and said: "…for it is written: 'He shall give His Angels charge over you,' and, 'in their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone' " (Mt 4:6). However, he omitted the following phrase between the two sentences: "to keep you in all your ways" (Ps 91:11). Inspired by the Spirit, the psalmist assures those who are determined to walk in God's way of His complete protection. If we are willing to trust God in all our ways, He will look after us day by day. The Bible does not suggest that we should tempt God by exposing ourselves to danger. Unlike Eve, Jesus resisted this temptation with the word of God and the sword of the Spirit, which is the perfect weapon to ward off the evil one (Eph 6:17).

Even today Satan often makes use of incomplete quotations from the Bible to deceive us. The difference is that he may not do so personally, but through other people. A true Christian, therefore, needs to be well equipped with the word of righteousness, discerning both good and evil (Heb 5:13-14).

Sometimes people say, "Our church always says… but is it so?" Quite often, the quotation is not exactly what the church generally says. Questioning any unconfirmed statement of the church may elevate the authority of the speaker. This method is a cunning way for the speaker to establish credibility. Such scenarios were long prophesied by Apostle Peter:

"[T]here were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed." (2 Pet 2:1,2)

This biblical prophecy was fulfilled

during the apostolic time and will be fulfilled in the end times. For this reason, believers must both fend off false teachings and constantly examine their own understanding through biblical truth. Believers must rely on the Holy Sprit to prevent deception, and be diligent in learning true knowledge from the Scriptures, lest becoming a false prophet.

FALSE PROPHETS ARE NOT NEW

Throughout the Bible, we see false prophets emerging. Before the Israelites set foot in the promised land, Moses warned them at the east bank of the River Jordan: false prophets and dreamer of dreams would arise to entice the chosen people, even through signs or wonders, away from the way God commanded them to walk (Deut 13:1–5).

During the apostolic time, Satan deceived some believers by disturbing the faith of those who did not receive the love of the truth and did not pursue after and follow the truth (2 Thess 2:10). These people took more pleasure in unrighteousness than in the truth. They were subsequently given over to strong delusion, leading them to believe in lies. By following the deception, they perished.

Peter warns us of "false teachers among you … who will secretly bring in destructive heresies…" If we do not discern what we hear by using the word of God and the Spirit of Truth as a measure, we could believe in falsehood and be deceived.

"The coming of the lawless one (false prophet within the church) *is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders." (2 Thess 2:9)*

The history of the True Jesus Church reveals records of false prophets arising from time to time.

A true servant of God does not stir up disharmony or dissension in the church. He possesses the wisdom from above, pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.

This is comprehensible, as the apostles repeatedly warned of such deception. A December 31, 1947[1] special edition publication of the True Jesus Church lists fourteen events where false prophets arose to disturb the church and led away a few members, in numbers of tens to about four hundred. The publication also recorded their whereabouts after they left the church. Two groups withered while the rest disassembled. These events were like sudden violent storms in otherwise peaceful days. They could collapse houses and uproot trees. However, no matter how devastating the storms were, they always passed, and the flooding rains ceased.

When the disciples asked Jesus about the signs of His second coming and of the end-time, Jesus answered, "Take heed that no one deceives you" (Mt 24:3-4). He depicted the signs in visible wars and disasters, but reminded them that these would be merely the beginning of sorrows. The worse is yet to come.

Jesus said, "many will be offended (stumbled[2]), will betray one another, and will hate one another…many false prophets will rise up and deceive many, and because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold" (Mt 24:10-11). The most frightening part before the second coming of Jesus is neither tribulation nor the impending hatred, but that many will stumble, and forsake the faith. This is the disaster Jesus foretold. He desires that His loved ones prepare well and be victorious.

A true Christian, therefore, needs to be well equipped with the word of righteousness, discerning both good and evil (Heb 5:13-14).

Jesus alerted His disciples, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves" (Mt 7:15). So how do we identify these wolves in sheep's clothing?

OBSERVE THE FRUIT

"Every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Therefore by their fruits you will know them." (Mt 7:17-20)

Jesus teaches us to identify false prophets by their deeds and the effects of their behavior. A true servant of God does not stir up disharmony or dissension in the church. He possesses the wisdom from above, pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. As James remarked, "the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace" (Jas 3:17-18). On the other hand, bitter envy and self-seeking in one's heart causes disputes and divisions in the church. If a servant of God stirs up unquenchable disharmony in the church, he is a false servant.

Paul was perfectly aware of this matter. In his parting words, he warned the elders of the Ephesian church, "after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves" (Acts 20:29). Paul knew that his ministry of the gospel was not out of harm's way. Satan will never let go of any opportunity to seize some of the elect away with him. He walks about like a roaring lion, seeking those whom he

may devour.

The Bible repeatedly warns that false prophets and false believers will come from both outside of and within the church. As true believers, we must always be sober and vigilant. We need to continually familiarize and equip ourselves with the Bible, relying on God's word for wisdom to discern the truth.

"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." (Heb 4:12)

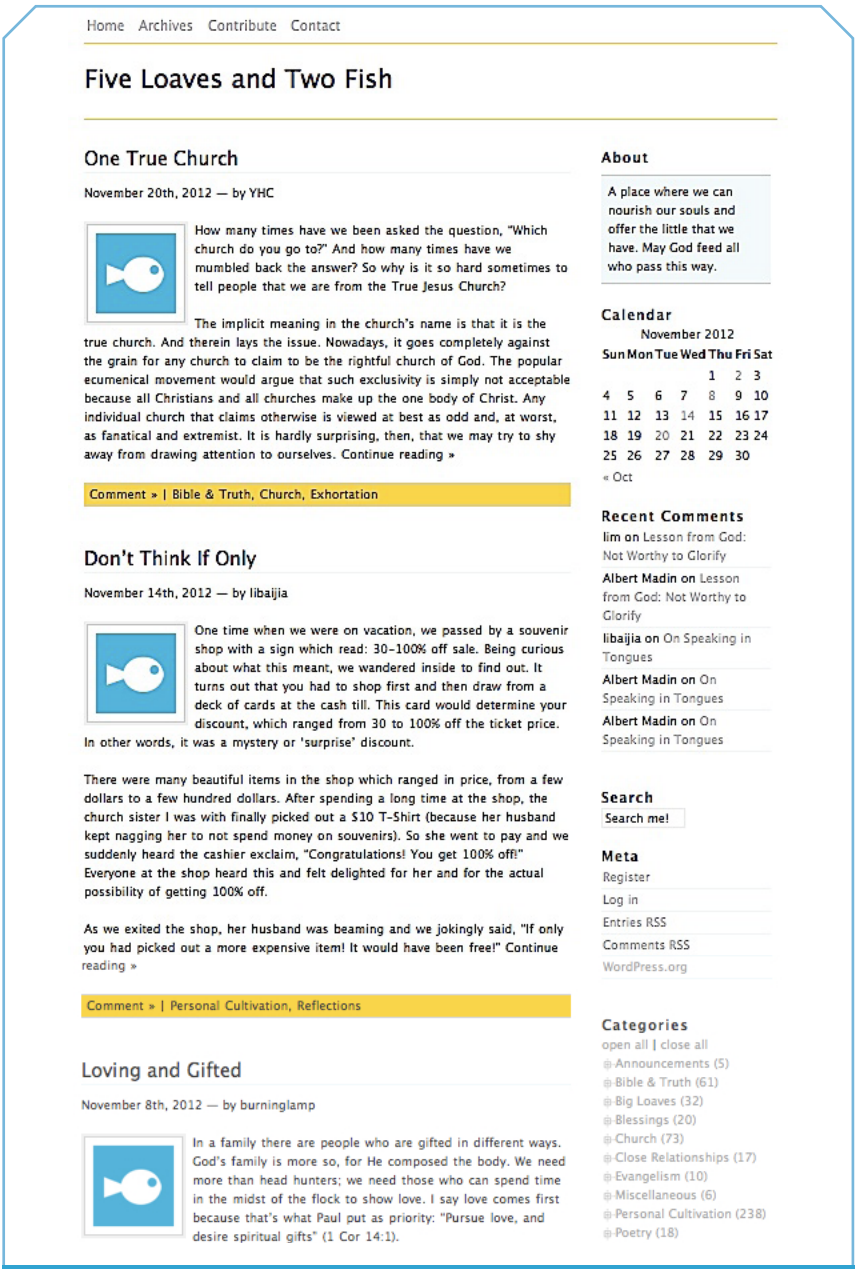
While we observe the fruits of God's workers, we must also consider our own fruits. An upright believer of Jesus would quiet his heart and examine himself. Have I caused any harm and dishonor within the body of Christ? Do my words and deeds edify the church and fellow believers?

Every good tree bears good fruit and every bad tree bears bad fruit. This is a measure given by the Lord Jesus to examine ourselves and identify false prophets. Today, let us abide in the Lord to bear good fruits, for without Him we cannot do anything.

"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples." (Jn 15:5,8) ★

1 Commemoration of the thirtieth anniversary of the establishment of the True Jesus Church, December 31, 1947. Chapter 10, entitled "Winds of Heresies"

2 G4624 σκανδαλίζω to entrap, that is, trip up (figuratively stumble [transitively] or entice to sin, apostasy or displeasure)



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Steadfast in the Truth

Adapted from a sermon by Lin Yung-Ji—Taichung, Taiwan

Our faith is precious because we have the immutable truth. This truth is the word of God which guides us through our lives. Following the truth keeps us from getting lost in our journey through life and will eventually lead us into the heavenly kingdom.

In contrast, the devil is a liar and the world's greatest swindler who wants to lure man into corruption. He is relentless and tireless in his attempts to deceive mankind. He alters the gospel of salvation, thus causing man to lose their faith in the church that belongs to God.

It is thus imperative for us to have a deep and clear understanding of the truth we preach, both for ourselves as well as for the sake of those whom we teach. Without the right understanding, we will lead others astray.

In this modern age where both information and misinformation abound, believers of the true church must undertake the following in order to remain steadfast in the truth:

KNOW WHERE THE TRUTH COMES FROM

First, we need to understand where the truth comes from. The author of the book of Hebrews indicates the source of truth: "…which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him" (Heb 1:1–2, 2:3).

The Truth Comes from the Lord's Teachings

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (Jn 14:6).

Everything that Jesus taught while He was in the world is from God. His words are immutable truth and carry life; no wonder Peter said to the Lord: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Jn 6:68–69). Through the cross, the Lord opened up a new and living way for us; those who trust in Him will overcome sin and death.

The Truth Comes from the Disciples' Teachings

Having been taught personally by the Lord, Jesus' disciples went on to faithfully teach others. Thus, Apostle John said, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life – the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us – that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 Jn 1:1-3).

The apostles' words carried spiritual authority and power; the truth that we have received was once for all delivered to the apostles (Jude 3). Paul boldly declared: "Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle" (2 Thess 2:15). There is thus no need for further revelations.

REMAIN STEADFAST IN THE TRUTH THAT WE WERE TAUGHT

Interpret the Word of God Correctly

The Bible is the truth. However, exegesis is needed so that others can understand it. When we explain the truth, we need to interpret the word correctly, i.e., look at the intended meaning, which is what God intended

to reveal (2 Tim 2:15). We ought to rely on the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, rather than the wisdom of man, to understand the Scriptures (1 Cor 2:4–13). We ought not rely solely on our own experiences to interpret the Bible. Also, it is important to understand the background of that biblical event, the situational circumstances and the intended meaning.

The intended meaning of the Bible is based on God's will and not man's will. God's will is true. As such, God's word will never contradict itself. If there is any contradiction, it must be man's will, as God does not cause confusion (1 Cor 14:33).

Occasionally, in a Bible study session where we share our views, a random thought may occur to us, which we may mistake for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Some may even compound this error by insisting that they had been inspired by the Holy Spirit when their views are questioned. Relying on their limited Bible knowledge, their narrow theological concepts, or by taking a Bible passage out of context, they defend their views even up to the point of strife, thinking they are right. Such behavior should set alarm bells ringing. If we are truly resolved to interpret the Bible based on the intended meaning, we will continue to study in greater depth with humble and honest hearts, sincerely relying on the Holy Spirit to open our minds and increase our understanding. In this way, our hearts will naturally be renewed and transformed and we shall receive the assurance of the spiritual truth.

The Importance of Interpreting the Bible Correctly

The truth leads people unto Christ, repentance, forgiveness of sins, rebirth, righteousness, and holiness. For this reason, we must "rightly [divide] the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15) and hold fast to the truth. We should not alter the truth for the sake of pleasing man, for if we do, the church will be divided and those who preach a different gospel will be cursed (Gal 1:6–10).

Sources of Misinterpretation

A thorough knowledge of the Bible, which allows us to correctly apply the word of God, is a prerequisite for being steadfast in the truth. Knowledge of the Scriptures, in turn, requires diligent study of the Bible. This will help us to avoid misinterpreting the word of God. The most common reasons for the misinterpretation of the Bible are as follows:

Misconception

Misconceptions arise when believers are unclear whether the source of their belief is scriptural or tradition. For example, a common traditional misconception among many Christian denominations is that believers receive the Holy Spirit when they believe; there is no need to pray for the Holy Spirit. However, a passage in John tells of some people who had believed in Jesus but had not yet received the Holy Spirit:

"But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified." (Jn 7:39)

So some of these Christians who had been traditionally taught that they had received the Holy Spirit when they believed begin to doubt the passage in John 7:39; they conclude that it is impossible for the disciples not to have the Holy Spirit at that time. Clearly then, such people go astray because they have taken the (erroneous) concept taught to them to be the truth, and have rejected the Bible passage that contradicted their understanding.

The right approach should be to always choose to believe in the word of God; we must choose instead to reject human or traditional concepts if these are contrary to the truth in the Scriptures.

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Misuse of Exegetical Principles

Usually, parables or symbolism cannot be interpreted literally. For example, David said, "But I am a worm, and no man" (Ps 22:6). Does that mean that he really was not human, but a worm? If we read the latter part of this verse, we will see that David was "[a] reproach of men, and despised by the people." The humiliation from others had caused David to feel and say that he was a worm and not a man.

Similarly, Ecclesiastes 1:4 is a metaphor: "One generation passes away, and another generation comes; [b]ut the earth abides forever." When we compare one human generation with the earth, the earth seems to abide forever. It would be wrong to use this verse to prove that the world will not be destroyed. Moreover, 2 Peter 3:10 states that the earth will be destroyed, and given that the Bible does not contradict itself, Ecclesiastes 1:4 should thus not be taken literally.

Over-emphasis on Reason, Neglecting Faith

During the time of Noah, God told him: "The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth" (Gen 6:13). In the Great Flood, Noah's family of eight were the only people saved because "[b]y faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household" (Heb 11:7). Although some may find it inexplicable how out of the many people who had lived back then, only such a small number of people were saved. But the author

of Hebrews tells us why—only these eight believed God's warning, and they were saved by their faith!

Today, some question how the True Jesus Church can be the only church that is saved since the church has a relatively small membership. To human reasoning, this appears unacceptable. But we must not apply only human reason; instead we should accept God's teachings with faith.

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven." (Mt 7:21)

Matthew 7:13–14 also reminds us to enter by the narrow gate: "because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it." It is with faith that we accept such teachings and remain steadfast in the truth. We need to interpret the truth correctly, so that we may know God, experience Him, and live out His life.

USE THE PURE TRUTH TO ADMONISH

The Importance of Admonishing Others

Using the pure truth to admonish is key in correcting those who have deviated from the faith. Erroneous concepts could happen. For example, the church in Thessalonica did not have the correct concept about where man would go after death; many grieved like those without hope (1 Thess 4:16–18; Rom 15:14). Similarly, the church in Crete was influenced by false teachers; their lives were corrupt. Therefore, Paul reminded Titus to instruct the shepherds in Crete to teach the pure truth to the local believers (Tit 1:11).

Method of Admonition

Pure teachings are correct teachings that promote spiritual health. When "impurities" creep in, we have to remove them from within our midst. Members promoting these teachings ought to be counseled firmly, yet in a spirit of gentleness (Gal 6:1). As Jude 22–23 advises, "on some have compassion, making a distinction, but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh."

Finally, "[h]e who hears, let him hear; and he who refuses, let him refuse" (Ezek 3:27).

Three Principles of Protecting the Truth

In order to protect the truth, workers should uphold the principles agreed within the church that apply to situations where workers hold a different view about the truth. This is similar to the apostolic church. When differences arose (Acts 15:1–32; 16: 4–5), these were brought before the elders in the Jerusalem council. Thereafter, when an agreement had been reached through the Holy Spirit's guidance, the final position was sent to the churches in other locations and everyone submitted to the agreement.

Likewise, today, the church has prescribed principles of protecting the truth that we have to follow:

- If the issue is directly related to the common faith, it must be discussed in the Truth Research Committee and should not be made public until there is a common consensus.
- If the issue is not directly related to our common faith but affects the understanding of the truth, it should be sent to the Truth Research Committee. In this case, it is acceptable to raise the issue at discussion platforms such as the theological seminary, workers' seminars, or other such special gatherings. However, it must be made clear that this new finding is purely the personal opinion of one individual; and that the issue has yet to be studied in depth.
- If the matter concerns only textual research or assumptions, it can be discussed or mentioned in discussion platforms, but it must be declared as one's personal opinion or finding.

Deadly Deception

There was once a widow who missed her deceased husband very much. Wanting to see him again badly, she went along with a friend to consult a medium. To her delight, she did "see" her husband. But she did not know that this was purely the work of an evil spirit. Worse, the demonic spirit continued to torment her and eventually drove her to suicide.

This story shows the consequences of not having a deep knowledge of the truth and not knowing what secular practices are abominable to our God.

REFUTE THOSE WHO ARGUE AGAINST THE TRUTH

In every era, distortions of the truth exist. This is not surprising because Satan is always waiting for an opportunity to destroy the work of God. Therefore, as God's children, we need to fight to protect the truth. The following are key strategies for the robust defense of the truth.

Rely on the Guidance of the Holy Spirit

A consistent and earnest emphasis on praying in the Spirit is of paramount importance. Not only will the Holy Spirit's guidance enable us to receive spiritual wisdom to understand and interpret the word of God correctly, He will also give us spiritual power to live out and defend the truth.

Church history will give us a glimpse of the flaws of various exegetes and serve as ample warning to us: some of them were extremely subjective and biased; some others were too conservative, stressing tradition and

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convention. Today, we have the help of the Holy Spirit and therefore, should defend the truth with humility and courage.

Take up the Commission to Lead Other Churches onto the Right Path of Salvation

While we have to prevent savage wolves from entering the flock, we must also fulfill our mission to lead other churches onto the right path of salvation. We must not think highly of ourselves, but instead humbly train up more workers to fulfill the commission that Jesus has entrusted to us.

Raise the Quality of All Church Workers

Good teachers will naturally be able to provide more solid training and train up even better students (2 Tim 2:2).

Today, if we want to fight against the evil one, we have to equip ourselves with the truth. We need to increase the emphasis on raising the quality of our workers. If the theological seminary has a group of good teachers, they will in turn produce workers who are also good teachers of the truth. Over time, the quality of the entire church's spiritual life can be raised by relying on the power of the Holy Spirit.

Strengthen the Literary Ministry

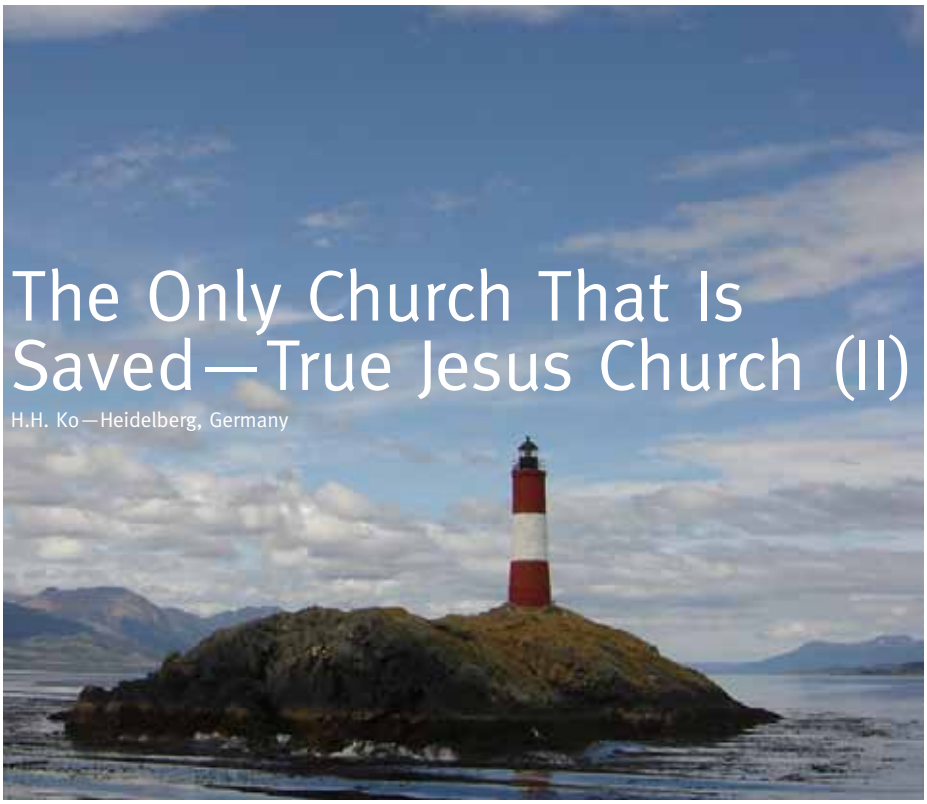
The gospel that the church preaches today is limited by its four walls; people outside the church building cannot hear the gospel—what a pity! The writers of the four gospels that describe Jesus' entire life knew very well that while the church was persecuted, the oral transmission of the gospel could only be a short-term plan. In order to preserve the four gospels, it was only logical to write them down.

In the past few years, the church's growth has benefited from the publication of written material. In this way, the true gospel can be preached throughout the world; literary resources have become very important tools of evangelism. We must therefore encourage more members with literary talent to write for the gospel.

CONCLUSION

Over the years the True Jesus Church has often been misunderstood and attacked as being heretical. This is part of Satan's work to oppose the truth of salvation and to make us waver in our faith. As members of the true church, we must always have a clear understanding of the truth that we have received. We must know where the truth comes from and how to interpret it correctly. Only then will we be able to remain steadfast in the truth, defend it and lead others onto the true path of salvation. ★

DOCTRINAL & BIBLE STUDIES



The Only Church That Is Saved—True Jesus Church (II)

H.H. Ko—Heidelberg, Germany

In the previous issue, we discussed the definition of "church" and the true church's spiritual essence. Historically, we can view the church within time and space; spiritually, we can look at the church in heaven. The Bible tells us that, in the spiritual realm, the church has been a reality even before God created the world; she is the mystery hidden in Christ, through whom all who believe can be reconciled to God. At Pentecost, the church became a historical reality through the downpouring of the promised Holy Spirit.

Part II of this series continues to examine the true church from a spiritual angle. Based on her spiritual essence, we will discuss what makes the church unique. In addition, we will look at biblical analogies that support the concept of the one and only church of God.

UNIQUENESS OF THE CHURCH FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF HER SPIRITUAL ESSENCE

The One True God Had in Mind the Only Church Before Time Began

Our God is the only true God; this truth is an indisputable axiom. Time and again, God has proclaimed His oneness to His people in simple and unambiguous ways (Deut 6:4; Zech 14:9; Mk 12:29; Jn 5:44, 17:3; Rom 16:27; 1 Tim 1:17, 6:16; Jude 25).

Because of His omnipotence and omniscience, God has an immutable will unfathomable by human beings, who are limited by time and space. Hence, He proclaimed through prophet Malachi: "For I am the LORD, I do not change" (Mal 3:6); He will not lie nor relent. The unchanging will of the only and unchanging God is the most fundamental source of the church's uniqueness.

Apostle Paul, having the mind of Christ, gained in-depth understanding of God's will; in the following Scriptures, he expounds how God manifested His will and His foreknowledge that preceded time itself through the church in Jesus Christ:

"[W]ho has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began." (2 Tim 1:9)

"[I]n hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began." (Tit 1:2)

"[B]ut has in due time manifested His word through preaching, which was committed to me according to the commandment of God our Savior." (Tit 1:3)

Peter too had a clear understanding of this truth:
"[E]lect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied." (1 Pet 1:2)

God's unchanging will has predetermined that the elect, "in the dispensation of the fullness of the times," might be gathered together with "all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth" (Eph 1:10). The "oneness in Christ" refers to the realized church in God's salvation plan, comprising redeemed believers gathered as Christ's one body.

The Only Savior Jesus Redeemed the Only Church with His Own Blood

In the Old Testament, whenever God's people met with affliction, they would call upon God with one heart, addressing Him as Savior (Ps 18:2, 22:19, 121:2; Isa 43:3, 45:15, 60:16; Jer 14:8). At the same time, God would declare to them "even I, am the LORD (the self-existing); [a]nd besides Me there is no savior" (Isa 43:11; cf. Isa 45:21; Hos 13:4).

Today, the Lord Jesus Christ, foreordained before the foundation of the world but manifested in these end times (cf. 1 Pet 1:20), continues the salvation work, which was started in ancient times. The scope of His work has become deeper and wider. Not only does He save His people from physical and mental affliction, He even uses "His own blood" to redeem the mankind from their sins (Mt 1:21; Acts 20:28). Thus, He paved the way for the realization of the church among men, for Revelation 5:9–10 tells us that those whom Christ has redeemed with His blood were made a kingdom and priests to God.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Savior (cf. Lk 2:11; Acts 5:31; Rom 11:26; Phil 3:20; 1 Tim 1:1; Tit 1:4, 2:13). Moreover, He is the only Lord (Jude 4) and the only God (Jude 25); He is also the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe (1 Tim 4:10). The precious blood that flowed from His side when He was hung on the cross became the fountain of redemption for God's people.

Just as Jesus' side was pierced, from which blood flowed for the church's redemption, Adam's side was opened when God took one of his ribs to form the first woman. As Paul writes: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word" (Eph 5:25–26). Hence, Christ's relationship with the church is that of a husband and wife—an absolutely monogamous relationship where the two become one flesh (cf. Jn 19:34–35; Eph 5:25–26; Gen 2:21–25).

From the discussion above, we understand that there is only one church that has her origin in the precious blood that flowed from the side of the only Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The Only Promised Holy Spirit Guides the Only Church into All Truth

In God's salvation plan, the descent of the promised Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost marks the beginning of the church era. Through the church, God declares His manifold wisdom to the principalities and powers in

Principles of Apology and Spirit Discernment

Principle of Apology

a. Paul's absolute principle: "What we have preached to you"
Principle of discernment: Is it in accordance with the apostles' teachings? (Gal 1:6–9)

b. Jude's principle: "Once for all"
Principle of discernment: Is it in accordance with the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints? (Jude 3)

c. The Bible's final absolute standard
Principle of discernment: Is the truth discussed or told, whether deduced or inspired by the Spirit, based on the Bible as the ultimate absolute standard?

Testing the Spirits

a. Peter's principle: experience/spiritual tradition
Principle of discernment: Have they received the Holy Spirit "just as we have?" (Acts 10:44–48; 11:15–18)

b. John's principle #1: truth/tradition of the word
Principle of discernment: Does the spirit listen to us? Does it believe in the same truth as we do? (1 Jn 4:1–6)

c. John's principle #2: unity/one body/orthodox church organization
Principle of discernment: Did they "go out from us?" (1 Jn 2:18–22) Do they submit themselves to the church? Do they promote harmony, unity, and a spirit of being one body among members? (cf. 1 Cor 3:1–5; Jas 3:13–18)

the heavenly places (Eph 3:10). Moreover, He is to receive glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever (Eph 3:21). Paul was deeply moved by this revelation and exclaimed "amen."

In the New Testament era, the church was established under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. The Holy Spirit established only one church, for "[t]here is one body and one Spirit" (Eph 4:4). Since the church has received the only promised Holy Spirit, she is able to enter into all truth and uphold the faith that was once and for all entrusted to her.

During the apostolic church era, some heeded the spirit of error and became false disciples. They became the servants of Satan and started to spread heresies in the church (1 Jn 4:6; 2 Cor 11:12–15; 1 Tim 1:3). Their message spread like cancer, they strayed concerning the truth, and they overthrew the faith of some (2 Tim 2:17–18).

However, the promised Holy Spirit guided the apostles to specify principles of apology and spirit discernment in order to uphold the truth and preserve the only true church.

In summary, the church may be diversified and multiple when we look at her from a social perspective. However, if we look at the church's spiritual essence, she is always one.

BIBLICAL EVIDENCE OF "ONE AND ONLY" CHURCH IN THE FORM OF ANALOGY

Based on the above discussion, there is only one church from the spiritual perspective. Not only is this important truth positively proven in the Bible, God has also given us many parables/metaphors and analogies through which this truth is made more distinctive. We will only mention four out of the many evidences: the church is the body of Christ, the church is the bride of Christ, Noah's ark, and the only promised son of Abraham amongst his many sons.

God's unchanging will has predetermined that the elect, "in the dispensation of the fullness of the times," might be gathered together with "all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth" (Eph 1:10). The "oneness in Christ" refers to the realized church in God's salvation plan, comprising redeemed believers gathered as Christ's one body.

The Church Is the Body of Christ

Apostle Paul once stated that Christ's body is the church (Col 1:24). Afterwards, he proceeded to expound that "the church…is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (Eph 1:23). These two Bible verses show that Christ is the head of the church:

"And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence." (Col 1:17–18)

Since Christ is the head of the church (Eph 5:23), the entire body is led by Him. Believers are members of this body, and although there are many members, there is only one body (1 Cor 12:12–13). Moreover, there is only one faith within the body of Christ (Eph 4:5). Today, there are many different denominations under the "Christian" umbrella. They are not of the same faith. For instance, a church that baptizes in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost does not have the same faith as the church that practices baptism in Jesus' name. Therefore, the body of Christ, which has only one faith, can never include all Christian denominations.

Since Christ is the head of the church and the church is the body of Christ, their relationship is always a one-to-one relationship. For there is only one head and one body. Christ is always one and His body, the church, is always one as well. How would you react if you saw someone with one head but two bodies?

The Church Is the Bride of Christ

As far back as the Old Testament time, God already referred to the Israelites, His chosen people, as His bride (Isa 54:5–8, 62:5; Jer 2:2). In the book of Hosea, God likened those chosen people who rebelled against God's commands to an unfaithful wife; in fact, the Israelites brought unparalleled tragedy upon themselves through their relentless unfaithfulness (Jer 3; Ezek 16).

In the New Testament time, the Lord Jesus, the Word incarnate, continued to use the symbolism that described the relationship between God and His people in the Old Testament time, He too likened Himself to a bridegroom (Mk 2:18–20). In Ephesians 5:22–33, Paul, who had a profound understanding of the mystery of Christ, expounded the deeper teaching of the husband–wife relationship between Christ and His church after describing the relationship between spouses. He spelled out the expectations of the church as the bride, which is her faithfulness towards Christ, the husband to whom she is betrothed (2 Cor 11:2–3).

The book of Revelation, in which God prophesies about the last days, also draws the analogy that the True Jesus Church, the ark of the last days, is the Lord's "wife" (Rev 19:7, 21:9). Monogamy is the only principle when God instituted marriage. The Lord Jesus Christ is the husband of the church and the church is His bride; the Lord Jesus Christ is the one and only, therefore, there is only one church—this truth is self-evident.

Noah's Ark

In Noah's time, "[t]he earth was corrupt before God, the earth was filled with violence" and "[t]he end of all flesh has come before God,"

"[b]ut Noah found grace in the eyes of God" (Gen 6:11, 13, 8). The New Testament refers to Noah's ark as a prefiguration of the true God's salvation:

"…[W]ho formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine long-suffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ…" (1 Pet 3:20–21)

This prefiguration tells us there was only one ark that was built according to the specifications of God, only one family that was saved by entering into the ark, and that this one ark was the only way to salvation during the great destruction in the ancient times. Therefore, there is only one church through which salvation is guaranteed before the day of God's great wrath.

The One and Only Promised Son of Abraham Amongst His Many Sons

Based on biblical genealogy, a family tree always starts with the father, i.e., "the son of XX (father's name)," for example, "the son of Adam," "the son of Noah," "the son of Shem," etc. Family ethics gives eight men the rightful claim to Abraham as father; these eight sons were Abraham's physical descendants (Gen 25:1–6; 1 Chr 1:28–34). Yet, from a spiritual perspective, they are categorized and evaluated differently. If we look at the sons of Abraham who came through Keturah, the wife he took in his old age after Sarah had died, the message we gather from the Bible is as follows:

"Abraham again took a wife, and her name was Keturah. And she bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. … All these were the children of Keturah." (Gen 25:1–4)

Although these six men originated from Abraham, they were called "the children of Keturah" (Gen 25:4; 1 Chr 1:33) instead of "the children of Abraham"; indicating that they did not have a part in God's promised blessings. They were excluded from God's salvation plan that was to be accomplished through Abraham. We see that in the end, "Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac. But Abraham gave gifts to the sons of the concubines which Abraham had; and while he was still living he sent them eastward, away from Isaac his son, to the country of the east" (Gen 25:5–6).

If we were to examine the sons of Abraham from the viewpoint of those under the law, we would see that "Abraham has two sons," just as Paul said: "Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons: one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman" (Gal 4:21–22).

Yet, God told Abraham directly: "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love" (Gen 22:2). In the eyes of God, Abraham had only one son—Isaac, whom he had received through promise.

Isaac was born of Sarah, the freewoman, symbolizing the Jerusalem above, the kingdom of God (Gal 4:23–26). To be part of God's kingdom, we must be born "from above[1]"—of water and the Spirit (Jn 3:3,5). Those who are born of water through baptism in Jesus' name will receive the promised Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit testifies that we are children of God and His heirs (cf. Joel 2:28–29; Acts 1:5, 11:15–16; Rom 8:15–17; Eph 1:13–14); we must be baptized in the name of Jesus to wash away our sins and be reborn as the sons of God (cf. Acts 2:37–39; Gal 3:26–29). The True Jesus Church preaches and practices in accordance with this, and is thus the "Jerusalem above" and "mother of us all."

Other churches with differing beliefs and practices are symbolized by Hagar, whose children are not numbered amongst the children of promise.

[To be continued…] ★

Analogies That Illustrate The Unique Nature Of The Church:

- the church is the house of Christ (Heb 3:6),
- the church is the house of God (1 Tim 3:15; Heb 10:21),
- the church is the household of God (Eph 2:19–22; 1 Pet 2:4–5),
- the church is the temple of God (1 Cor 3:16–17),
- the church is the kingdom of God (Rom 14:17; Col 1:13),
- the church is God's flock (Ps 80:1; Ezek 14:15; Jn 10:1–30),
- the church is God's vineyard (Isa 5:1–2,7; Mk 12:1–12; Jn 15:1–8).

1 The Greek text of Jn 3:3 uses "γεννηθῇ ἄνωθεν" (gennithí anōthen) for "born again." The term "ἄνωθεν" (anōthen) actually means "from above, from a higher place."

Why We Can and Should Baptize Our Infants

Samuel Kuo – Cerritos, California, USA

Many members of the True Jesus Church know that they can baptize their children, but often they find it difficult to articulate why. Recently, this topic came up in a conversation and I heard a long-time member speculate, "Isn't it because the faith of the parent is imparted onto his infant?" This answer sounds attractive, and may also be the first reason that surfaces in our minds. However, taken verbatim, this is completely unscriptural; there is no biblical example of anyone's faith being *counted* as another's. So the question remains: why do we baptize our infants even though they cannot believe and repent? And why should we, if we can?

Before we address these questions, it is beneficial to first look at this issue from a historical perspective.

INFANT BAPTISM IN CHURCH HISTORY

When we examine the history of the Christian church, we should remember that the baptism of infants was practiced in the early church without significant controversy. As one scholar wrote,

Although Christian baptism was often surrounded by contention in the patristic centuries, especially in the western church, the period saw no significant disagreement about the acceptability of baptizing babies. There is no precedent in the era of the Fathers for the baptismal divide of the sixteenth and subsequent centuries.[1]

The only controversial views of note in the early Christian centuries were those of the Latin Church Father, Tertullian (c.160 – c.225 AD), who wrote in his *De Baptismo*, "And so, according to the circumstances and disposition, and even age, of each individual, the delay of baptism is preferable; principally, however, in the case of little children[2]." In summary, he advocated the deferment of baptism because he thought it to be more profitable.[3] However, it must be understood that he was not an outright opponent of infant baptism. To him, it was still acceptable to baptize young children.

There were other contentions with baptism, but on the whole, the church continued to baptize young children for centuries.

It was only in the 16th century, during the Reformation, that infant baptism started to become a divisive issue. Factions arose that completely opposed infant baptism and considered it an invalid institution. A division arose between those who supported *paedobaptism*, the baptism of children, and those who supported *credobaptism*, only baptizing those who could confess belief.

The most significant group to arise during this time was called the "Swiss Brethren," who later came to be called the Anabaptists by their opponents. The movement started in Switzerland, spread almost instantaneously over many countries, and ran as a side current to the main stream of the Reformation.

Conrad Grebel is known as the father of the Swiss Brethren. He had been led to the evangelical faith by the Swiss Reformer Huldrych Zwingli, and became a prominent member of the church in Zurich. However, he was soon disappointed with both Zwingli and Martin Luther. Grebel and others felt that these reformers were not moving fast enough in purifying the church and applying the principles taught in the Scriptures. (Luther and Zwingli often cooperated and

waited on the State before instituting religious reforms.)[4] They detested how many members who converted to Protestantism in mass conversions did not change their lives, but continued to use the doctrine of salvation by faith only, without good works, as an excuse for loose living. Seeing the low quality of the converts, the Swiss Brethren insisted that membership in the church be limited to those who consciously committed themselves to Christ. They objected to easy memberships in the church by way of the State.[5] Because of these views, they vehemently opposed infant baptism. They saw it as an invalid practice. Those baptized without professing faith needed to be baptized again.

These criticisms culminated in January 1525, when an ex-priest named George Blaurock, who had been baptized in his infancy, asked Conrad Grebel to rebaptize him. After Grebel complied, Blaurock baptized fifteen others.[6] This event marked the birth of Swiss Anabaptism. The opponents of this movement called its members Anabaptists, which literally means, "one who baptizes again." The movement quickly spread to other parts of Switzerland, to southern Germany, and Monrovia.

Given this history, it should be no surprise that the orthodox Christian denominations (i.e., Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox) and the denominations stemming from the Magisterial Reformation (i.e., Lutherans, Calvinists, Reformed tradition) continue to practice infant baptism today. The denominations that have been directly or indirectly influenced by the Anabaptists (i.e., Mennonites, Amish, Baptists) practice a strict *credobaptism*. Pentecostal denominations typically practice *credobaptism* as well.

WHY WE CAN: GOD AND THE HOUSEHOLD

As with many doctrinal controversies, we need not choose sides too quickly, lest we jump into ideological traps. We must have a clear biblical understanding of why we can and should baptize our young children.

To begin, we must understand that the spirit of God's covenant with His chosen people is "to you and your descendants after you in their generations in an everlasting covenant" (Gen 17:7; cf. Deut 29:10–13; Josh 8:35). God extends His covenant to the entire household. Yes, the Anabaptists' concern was valid: every individual and every generation must build their personal relationship with God (cf. Isa 54:13; Jer 31:31–34). Nevertheless, God's grace and God's covenant are given freely to everybody within the household of faith. Therefore, we do not baptize just *any* infants. We baptize infants in the household of God.

Another principle we see in the Bible is that one adult believer can represent his or her entire family. In the Old Testament, we see that it was through Noah's faith that his entire household was saved (Heb 11:7). In the Gospels, when Zacchaeus accepted Jesus Christ in faith, Jesus told him, "Today salvation has come to this *house*" (Lk 19:9, emphasis added). During Paul's second missionary journey, the Lord opened Lydia's heart to heed the things spoken by Paul, following which, she and her household were baptized (Acts 16:14–15). Similarly, the Philippian jailer believed and his whole family was baptized (Acts 16:30–33). Lydia and the jailer serve as two specific cases of how individual believers could represent their entire household. Like Noah's and Zacchaeus' families, grace and salvation came to these households through one person's faith. In both incidences, not a word was mentioned about the faith of the other household members. They confirm that God desires to save entire households as a unit, not just individuals.[7] More importantly, in these two cases, we see the direct connection between the individual's household and the sacrament of baptism. In other words, water baptism is allowed to be administered to the family members of a believer, including their children.

All of these biblical examples confirm Peter's proclamation on the day of Pentecost, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is *to you and to your children*" (Acts 2:38–39a, emphasis added).

To begin, we must understand that the spirit of God's covenant with His chosen people is "to you and your descendants after you in their generations in an everlasting covenant"...every individual and every generation must build their personal relationship with God....Nevertheless, God's grace and God's covenant are given freely to everybody within the household of faith.

So, can an infant believe, repent, confess sins, and integrate into the holy community? Certainly not. But we cannot forbid their baptism for these reasons. Since they are part of the household of a believer, they are accorded the covenant promises. Grace has come to the entire house.

The Anabaptists' concern of weak Christians and loose living is still valid though. But we must remember that:

The baptism of the entire household does not guarantee that every member will be saved in the end. Even though the entire household, including the children, enters into God's covenant of salvation through baptism, it is still essential that every member establish their own faith and relationship with God. The heads of the household who have brought their children to baptism need to take up the responsibility of also teaching them and guiding them in the faith.[8]

This is related to the next issue of why we *should* baptize our young children, knowing now that we *can*.

WHY WE SHOULD: FAITH AND DUTY

Some members hesitate to baptize their children in fear of them sinning greatly against God, and leaving the faith when they are older. They think that it may be better for their children to make their own personal choice as an adult. So they may hold similar views to that of Tertullian, who advocated the postponement of baptism. Though raising children who eventually commit apostasy is a natural fear in Christian parenthood, the best course of action is still to baptize our infants. There are several reasons we should consider:

The first reason is that although young children may be innocent from conscious sins, the Bible tells us that *all* are sinners (Rom 5:12–14), including infants (cf. Ps 51:5). Thus, young children need to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins—especially since it is impossible to predict if they will be able to live until they can make their own decision. Who can know the future? If misfortune were to strike, wouldn't the decision not to baptize our children become the greatest regret?

Secondly, as parents, we instinctively seek to give the best to our children. When they are only a few weeks old, we have them vaccinated because we desire for them to live healthy lives free of preventable diseases. Similarly, without a second thought we enroll our children in formal schooling, even as young as three years old, because we know that education is essential for a productive life. We never hear of parents delaying until their children are adults so they can decide for themselves if they want to be vaccinated and go to primary school. That would seem absurd! But if we are so magnanimous with earthly things like health and education, should we not be even more eager to give the best gift to our children—to baptize them and allow them a chance to enter the heavenly kingdom (cf. Jn 3:5)?

Finally, as parents, we know that raising godly children is our God-given duty (cf. Mal 2:15; Deut 6:4–9). The very act of baptizing our young children serves as a great driving force in fulfilling this duty. Since baptism ushers them to the Lord (cf. Gal 3:26–29), this fact alone drives us to make every effort to ensure that they can *remain* in the Lord. After all, in any discipline, wouldn't we strive so much harder knowing there is no turning back over knowing there is a "safety net" underneath us?[9] This is similar to approaching a marriage with or without a prenuptial agreement. The first choice presumes failure and allows for divorce, while the other completely commits to the marriage, knowing that there is no return. Similarly, we must approach the baptism and upbringing of our infants with the same no-holds-barred mentality.

As we have seen, baptizing our children is not only acceptable, but is encouraged. May the Lord continue to give us wisdom not only in defending infant baptism, but also in the upbringing of our precious children. ★

Finally, as parents, we know that raising godly children is our God-given duty (cf. Mal 2:15; Deut 6:4–9). The very act of baptizing our young children serves as a great driving force in fulfilling this duty. Since baptism ushers them to the Lord (cf. Gal 3:26–29), this fact alone drives us to make every effort to ensure that they can *remain* in the Lord.

Footnotes:

1 Infant Baptism in Historical Perspective, 2007, David Wright, p.22

2 Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume III: Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian, 1885, On Baptism, Chapter 18, p.678.

3 Infant Baptism in Historical Perspective, 2007, David Wright, p.25-26

4 For this reason Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin are often known as the "Magisterial Reformers" since they argued for the interdependence of the church and state. In contrast, the Anabaptists were known as the "Radical Reformers."

5 The Church in History, 1965, B. K. Kuiper, p.205

6 A History of the Christian Church, 1986, Williston Walker, p.449

7 Other examples include Crispus' household (cf. Acts 18:8; 1 Cor 1:14), and Stephanas' household (1 Cor 1:16). For more information please reference The Doctrine of Baptism, USGA, 2011, Chapter 9.

8 The Doctrine of Baptism, USGA, 2011, Chapter 9.

9 Not that delaying baptism serves as any "safety net" at all, for there is no guarantee that our unbaptized children would even choose the faith in their adulthood.

The Fall of Satan: A Biblical Investigation (I)

Luo Ci Yi—Taiwan

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INTRODUCTION

The origin of evil is an age-old philosophical problem, which has attracted many scholars and has led to a plethora of diverse theories. The human mind by itself, constrained by the limits of space and time (Acts 17:26), can never grasp the truth about the spiritual realm. Therefore, we should not apply philosophical speculation or human precepts in discussing the truth concerning Satan's fall. Instead, we ask the Holy Spirit to personally guide us to understand the truth that God reveals to us through the Bible.

ORIGIN OF THE NAME "SATAN"

Nowadays, the New Testament term "devil" is commonly used to refer to the representation of evil. In Hebrew, the word for "devil' is שֵׁד (shed) and only appears twice in the Old Testament (Deut 32:17; Ps 106:37), whereas "Satan" is שָׂטָן (satan), meaning adversary or opponent; one who opposes the will of God. The Septuagint translates the Hebrew word שָׂטָן (satan) as Σατᾶνας (satanas).

The term traditionally used among Christians—"devil"—is translated from the Greek word διάβολος (diabolos) and this Greek word is derived from the verb διαβάλλειν (diaballein) in the same lexical family. These two words have an inseparable etymological relationship. The Greek word διαβάλλειν (diaballein) is a compound word from the preposition διά (dia) and the verb βάλλειν (ballein), which is literally translated as "to cast across" or "to hurl." It also connotes actions such as "slander," "oppose," "accuse," or "malign"; thus, the devil is called "the accuser" (Greek: κατήγορος - kategoros) in Revelation 12:10. Comparing the Old Testament term with the New Testament term shows that the "devil" is undoubtedly the epitome of evil and the leader of demons (Mt 9:34).

THE GOD WE WORSHIP IS THE ONE AND ONLY TRUE GOD

Before delving into the fall of Satan, our understanding of God in whom we believe must be correct. We must obey His revelation given to us through the Bible and use it as the basis of our study.

God Himself has revealed to man that He is the one and only God. This supreme and absolute message is not only a proclamation but is also a command that we must believe in. Therefore, the people of God in the Old Testament time built their faith on the foundation of God's "oneness[1]":

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!" (Deut 6:4)

"The Lord is one, [a]nd His name one." (Zech 14:9)

Jesus also testified to the oneness of God:

"The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one.'" (Mk 12:29)

"How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God?" (Jn 5:44)

"And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." (Jn 17:3)

In addition, the apostles made unequivocal declarations of their faith in the one true God (Jude 4, 25); particularly Apostle Paul, who understood God profoundly. Whenever he mentioned God's oneness, he would conclude with a votive and proclamatory "amen":

"…to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen." (Rom 16:27)

"Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen." (1 Tim 1:17)

"…who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen." (1 Tim 6:16)

THE GOD WE WORSHIP IS THE SELF-EXISTING TRUE GOD

We know the attributes of God from the Bible. With regard to essence, He is immutable (Jas 1:17; Heb 13:8). With regard to time, He is eternal (Ps 90:2; Rev 1:8). Moreover, He is omnipresent (Eph 4:6; Jer 23:23–24), omniscient (Ps 139:1–4), and omnipotent (Jer 32:17). He has absolute sovereignty over all things (Eph 1:4–5). These attributes of God are absolute and are reserved for God alone.

Furthermore, God is self-existing. As Jesus testified, "For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself" (Jn 5:26). God does not derive His existence from any other source; neither does His life depend on any external force. This supreme truth is something that man, the creature, can never understand; we can only accept. When Moses was called, he asked God who He was, and God answered by saying "I AM WHO I AM." This was the first time God directly proclaimed the mystery of His self-existing nature to man (Ex 3:13–14).

INSEPARABILITY OF "I AM WHO I AM' (SELF-EXISTING AND EVERLASTING)

In Exodus 3:14, God told Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" In the Hebrew Scriptures, God uses two repeated verbs – אֶהְיֶה ('eh·yeh - I AM) to introduce Himself and joins the repeated verb with אֲשֶׁר ('ă·šer - who, that). Therefore, the literal English translation is "I AM WHO I AM" (אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה). In the second part of the same verse, God refers to Himself as "I AM" אֶהְיֶה – a single verb.

Whether it is the repeated "I AM" for emphasis or a single "I AM," God's intent was to proclaim His self-existing and everlasting nature. In the Septuagint, the Greek Bible used during the time of Jesus and Paul, the same expression is rendered Ἐγώείμιὁὧν (Ego eimi o un), which literally means "I, I am, the one who is" (cf. Rev 1:8). When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He was also the true God in heaven in spiritual terms. Hence, He used Ἐγώείμι Greek: Ego eimi - I, I am) to reveal the uniqueness of His spiritual existence (cf. Jn 8:24, 28, 58).

Although the Union Version of the Chinese Bible translates the self-revelation of God, "I, I am," into "self-existing and everlasting," the term cannot be divided because it refers to only one condition. The true meaning of "self-existing and everlasting" is actually "I am, I am." Readers of the Chinese Bible may thus make the mistake of dividing the whole term of "I am, I am" into two conditions—"self-existing" and "everlasting." After separating this characteristic that belongs to God alone, some may go even further and apply human reasoning to conclude that God is self-existing and everlasting, while Satan is self-existing but not everlasting.

In order to see the truth behind God's proclamation of "I am, I am," we need to return to the original Hebrew text. In this way, we will see that the two "I am" are inseparable. We cannot claim that God is "I am" and "I am," while Satan is "I am" but not "I am." Moreover, God proclaimed in the same verse that He is the self-existing and everlasting one who does not require the emphasis of a repeated verb—the "I AM."

THE GOD WE WORSHIP IS THE ONLY SELF-EXISTING TRUE GOD

The God we worship is not only self-existing, He is also the ONLY self-existing true God. There is nothing else in existence that is like God or that has His absolute self-existing nature. In Isaiah 43:12, God makes His chosen people His witnesses that there was no foreign god among them. Henceforth, God declares: "I am the LORD, and there is no other; there is no God besides Me" (Isa 45:5; cf. Isa 45:14, 18, 21, 22; Dan 3:29).

God is the only absolute being; an unequalled being whose self-existence is without comparison. The Bible portrays this truth as follows: "LORD God of Israel, there is no God in heaven above or on earth below like You" (1 Kgs 8:23). We also see how "there is no one like the God of Jeshurun" from the blessing of Moses, the man of God (Deut 33:26). David too conveys the truth concerning the inimitable nature of God: "Therefore You are great, O LORD GOD. For there is none like You, nor is there any God besides You, according to all that we have heard with our ears" (2 Sam 7:22; cf. Ps 86:8).

Before delving into the fall of Satan, our understanding of God in whom we believe must be correct. We must obey His revelation given to us through the Bible and use it as the basis of our study. God Himself has revealed to man that He is the one and only God.

The description of God's unique existence, "I AM WHO I AM" (self-existing and everlasting), cannot be separated and is reserved for Him alone.

With these clear revelations from God and proclamations from witnesses of faith, we can declare with conviction that only the true God we worship is self-existing and everlasting—the only I AM. The description of God's unique existence, "I AM WHO I AM" (self-existing and everlasting), cannot be separated and is reserved for Him alone.

THE ONE TRUE GOD AND THE CREATION OF ALL THINGS

Everything that exists is either created or not created. Nothing in creation originated from itself but from the LORD who created everything. The God whom we worship is not only an unparalleled being but also the source of all things. He is the Creator who created all that exist apart from Him. In other words, He is the only self-existing being and the only Creator; everything else is created. This is exactly what the Bible records: "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (Jn 1:3). Hence, Paul took great pains to introduce God as the "God who created all things" (Eph 3:9)—a fact that is supported by many references in the Bible (cf. Heb 3:4; Neh 9:6; Isa 44, 45; Jer 10:12; Rev 4:11).

In addition, Paul received a revelation from God regarding His creation:

"For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him." (Col 1:16)

Here, Paul categorizes God's entire creation into two levels, based on locality: heaven and earth. These two levels also include things that are visible and invisible. Paul follows on by making specific mention of four distinct creations: thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers.

[To be continued…] ★

In the next issue, part two of this article will explore the downfall of God's creation in the spiritual realm.

1 "Oneness" as used in this article refers to God's uniqueness, i.e., that there is only one God.

Beware Satan's Old Trick—Sowing Discord

Philip Shee—Dubai, UAE

"If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand" (Mk 3:24–25). While Jesus made this remark in defense against the accusations of the scribes, it reflects an underlying truth: "Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken" (Eccl 4:12). The importance of unity amongst God's people is easy to comprehend. However, as much as we appreciate this and strive to unite in faith and service to the Lord, building on the foundation of love, Satan often seeks to weaken this foundation of love, sowing discord to destroy the unity among us.

GUARD THE UNITY AND LOVE IN OUR FAMILIES

A Christian family united in love can accomplish much for the Lord and bring much encouragement to others. Such family units are the building blocks of a strong, united and glorious church. Consequently, as we build up our families in the Lord and serve Him as family units, we must exercise extra vigilance and guard against Satan's attempts to taint the love among family members and sow discord within the family.

The story of Adam and Eve is frequently quoted during Christian wedding services to depict the pure and deep love between spouses. "This is the bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen 3:23). Adam's spontaneous remark when Eve was first brought before him is probably one of the most touching descriptions a man could make to express his feeling for his wife. His love for Eve was way beyond just skin deep. If his entire physical being constituted the collection of his bones wrapped beneath his flesh, then he certainly did not see Eve as just an ordinary part of himself. But as bone of all his bones, and flesh of all his flesh, he loved her as the most precious and an indispensable part of himself. As bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh, there was no way he could have loved himself without first loving her even more. Such love was selfless, as he deemed his spouse more precious than himself. This union was instituted by God with the intention for man to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth with godly people (Gen 1:28; Mal 2:15). By this, God was to be glorified, and His very nature of love would have been manifested in man.

Unfortunately, this bond of love did not last very long as Satan promptly started his work to taint the love between Adam and Eve. When they fell to sin through their disobedience to God's instruction, selfless love gave way to selfishness. When questioned by God, Adam did not shoulder the responsibility but was quick to deflect the blame to Eve. Eve's status as "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" was promptly relegated to an impersonal and debased status of "the woman whom You gave to be with me" (Gen 3:12).

When Christian couples first exchange marriage vows in church, the bond between them is undoubtedly similar to that between Adam and Eve when she was first brought before him. Nevertheless, it is not uncommon to see even Christian couples' relationships wane over time. This is often due to differences that surface with time or intolerance over character flaws that were previously camouflaged or conveniently overlooked. While they may physically remain together out of basic fear for God,

It is not uncommon to see even Christian couples' relationships wane over time. ... This provides an important reminder to Christian couples to make special effort to nurture their relationships, to endeavor to have God remain as the foundation of their relationship and not to give Satan any opportunity to plant any seed of discord between them.

Satan successfully blemished the love between them. Undoubtedly, Christian couples ending in this state are negatively affected in both their faith and their service to God. This provides an important reminder to Christian couples to make special effort to nurture their relationships, to endeavor to have God remain as the foundation of their relationship and not to give Satan any opportunity to plant any seed of discord between them.

By the wonderful arrangement of God, the siblings, Aaron, Miriam, and Moses were blessed with the opportunity of serving God together, playing the critical role of leading His people in the journey through the wilderness. While they had worked well together for some time and undoubtedly loved and cared for one another, strangely, there came a time when Aaron and Miriam partnered to turn against Moses. They spoke against Moses and were quick to find faults with him. They criticized His marriage with the Ethiopian woman. They questioned his authority, and reasoned that God had also spoken through them and not just through Moses (Num 12:1–2).

It is not obvious what wrong Moses had done to trigger such adverse change and senseless hostility from his siblings given that "he was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth" (Num 12:3). However, this discord between the siblings threatened the work of God, as it could have compromised the great partnership among them. It would weaken their ability to stand before the people as positive examples of a godly family. It could also have created confusion and triggered a division among the people. God's reaction reinforced Moses' innocence, which thankfully, triggered Aaron and Miriam's repentance.

The incident further reminds us that we are vulnerable to dissension. Although Aaron and Miriam were not evil, unfaithful to God or unloving to Moses, they were senselessly caught up in initiating the dispute. Christian families fervent in serving God together must pay even more attention to this. Satan attacked the family of Moses, of David and many others. It is not unlikely for the same trick to be applied to us.

Therefore, as we serve God together as a family, we must be constantly on our guard against Satan, who will likely attempt to sow the seeds of discord to compromise our service. After all, squabbling families don't bring any glory to God and the unhappiness will likely distract members from their service.

EXTEND THE RIGHT HAND OF FELLOWSHIP TO CO-WORKERS

"After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go." (Lk 10:1)

By sending His disciples out two by two, the Lord showed that the work of God is not the exclusive privilege of any individual hero. He wanted His disciples to support one another and work together. This remained the approach in the early church. As the church grew following the downpour of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, the apostles continued to work as an integrated team of co-workers, teaching the new believers as "they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42).

Though Peter was a well-respected apostle, he did not operate alone but frequently worked together with John. They prayed together, and, together, they performed the miracle at the gate called Beautiful (Acts 3:1–11). They continued to preach to the people and were taken into custody together (Acts 4:1–3). Both of them then faced the council together and jointly responded to their threats (Acts 4:18–20). Even when the people in Samaria had already believed and were baptized by Philip, the apostles in Jerusalem sent Peter and John together to work with Philip, to help the new believers pray for the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:5–17). Such integration and unity in service among co-workers contributed to the continued growth of the apostolic church.

Paul's conversion marked the next phase of growth in the early church. He was an important apostle who was personally called by the Lord to minister to the Gentiles (Acts 9:4–18). Unlike many believers in the early church, Paul's training in the word was not on account of the apostles' teaching but from the abundance of direct revelations from the Lord (2 Cor 12:7; 1 Cor 11:23; 2 Cor 12:1–4).

Notwithstanding, Paul did not get carried away to initiate a separate line of ministry divided from the other apostles or the wider church. On the contrary, Paul humbled himself and took the initiative to go to Jerusalem to see Peter, with a clear intention to join the disciples (Gal 1:18–19; Acts 9:26–28). He maintained that integration with the apostles in Jerusalem throughout his ministry, visiting them again fourteen years later together with Barnabas (Gal 2:1).

Paul and Barnabas also did not make their individual conclusion over the dispute that arose around the necessity of circumcision for salvation. Instead, they consulted the apostles and elders in Jerusalem and participated in the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:1–29). In response, Peter and the other apostles gladly accepted Paul, appreciated his

calling, and gave Paul and Barnabas "the right hand of fellowship" (Gal 2:9). With no rivalry or personality conflicts among the co-workers, such unity in service triggered further growth within the church.

While the apostles enjoyed such unity in service, Satan started to strike. Peter gave way to his weakness and displayed his hypocrisy when he visited Antioch. Before certain men from James arrived, he would eat with the Gentile believers, but he withdrew himself when they arrived. Such inconsistency was unacceptable, as he not only failed to uphold the truth courageously, but also set a bad example for Barnabas and the other Jews. He also risked hurting the Gentile believers by his double standard.

This led to Paul confronting Peter (Gal 2:11–14), which was a dangerous development, as two very important workers could have fallen out and compromised the ministry of the Lord. It would have been disastrous if Peter had let his ego surface and reacted negatively to Paul's rebuke. It would have been equally disastrous if Paul had regarded this one-off weakness in Peter as his inherent nature and lost his trust and respect for Peter. Thankfully, both Peter and Paul were spiritual workers who did not fall into the trap of Satan to allow this incident to drive a wedge between them. This was evident in Peter's second epistle, in which he addressed Paul as "our beloved brother," recognizing his wisdom and also endorsing the epistles that Paul had written (2 Pet 3:15–16).

Another incident also threatened the unity between two co-workers, Paul and Barnabas, who had differing views over John Mark. Barnabas was determined to bring Mark along for their missionary journey, but Paul was adamantly against the idea. The contention became so sharp that both actually decided to part with each other. Paul then started working with Silas while Barnabas continued with Mark (Acts 15:36–40).

This was another dangerous development, as the work of God could have been hindered. Thankfully, the church continued to be strengthened and to increase in number daily (Acts 15:41, 16:4–5). While it was not ideal, on the surface, for Paul and Barnabas to part ways, both were spiritual workers who remained integrated into the wider church.

More importantly, while they had different opinions, they respected each other's opinion and did not undermine each other's work. In reality, both had valid reasons for the different stand they took. Paul regarded the work of God very seriously and did not feel that Mark was ready for it as he did indeed leave the ministry midway in Pamphylia (Acts 13:13). Barnabas, on the other hand, was true to his name as "Son of Encouragement" (Acts 4:36), and he wanted to give Mark another chance. This was consistent with his very nature, just as he trusted Paul and sought him out in Tarsus when others were still wary of him (Acts 9:26–28, 11:25–26). Over time, both Paul and Barnabas were proven right as God blessed their work. Paul continued to strengthen the church while Mark was turned around, such that even Paul finally acknowledged Mark to be useful for the ministry (2 Tim 4:11). This also points to the fact that Paul and Barnabas must have remained integrated through the church.

As these developments in the early church provide a glimpse of Satan's work in the church, we can learn several important lessons. Firstly, we must recognize that even good, sincere, and spiritual workers, like Peter, can have their moments of weakness. Hence, even if we observe a mistake in a co-worker, we must not be too quick to judge that to be an incorrigible character flaw and thereby completely lose our trust and respect, writing the co-worker off. While we may very well point out the errors of our co-workers, let us do so with the intention of turning them around rather than writing them off.

Secondly, we must accept that upright, sincere, and spiritual workers may have good intentions, which trigger different views. In such situations, it is critical to prevent different views from developing into animosity and suspicion of each other's intention, goodness, and sincerity. Like Paul and Barnabas, we need to remain respectful of the differences and not undermine or discredit our co-workers. We need to resist the temptation of devoting our efforts thereafter to proving our view to be right and our co-workers' to be wrong, which is counter-productive. We should, rather, learn from Paul and Barnabas in moving forward, focussing on progressing the work of God.

ENDEAVOR TO KEEP THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT IN THE CHURCH

The early church started united, as they "continu[ed] daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart" (Acts 2:46). The believers were so united and selfless that they had all things in common, and even sold their possessions and goods and divided them among all (Acts 2:44–45). For this reason, the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:47).

However as the church grew bigger, Satan also started sowing

Paul's conversion marked the next phase of growth in the early church. He was an important apostle who was personally called by the Lord to minister to the Gentiles (Acts 9:4–18). ... Notwithstanding, ... Paul humbled himself and took the initiative to go to Jerusalem to see Peter, with a clear intention to join the disciples (Gal 1:18–19; Acts 9:26–28). He maintained that integration with the apostles in Jerusalem throughout his ministry.

discord in the church to distract the church and disrupt the ministry of God. As the number of disciples multiplied, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution (Acts 6:1). If this was not handled appropriately, it could have resulted in unhealthy factions within the church, with growing mistrust and sensitivities between the factions.

It is interesting to note how people so readily and naturally gravitate towards a common grouping and start to take sides. Thankfully, the apostles exercised their wisdom and addressed this issue effectively by having the disciples elect seven men to assist in the work. This resolved the issue, and furthered the growth in the number of disciples in Jerusalem (Acts 6:5–7).

Taking reference from the solution, it would suggest that the original issue was not necessarily triggered by a deliberate, systemic neglect of the Hellenist widows by the Hebrews. Rather, it was the lack of more dedicated resources to share the workload with the apostles. The additional resources provided capacity to exercise more care and diligence in doing a fair and better job at serving the tables. However, it is interesting to note the sensitivities of the Hellenists in banding together and concluding wrongfully that they had been victimized.

Satan's attack intensified over time as the church spread to other cities. In Corinth, the division in the church was among clusters of believers who separately deemed themselves to be of Paul, Apollos, Peter, or of Christ (1 Cor 1:11–12). This was strange as the workers, Paul, Apollos, and Peter themselves were united as one and also, Christ is not divided (1 Cor 1:13). Hence, it was senseless for the believers to use Christ or any worker as an excuse or the basis to be divided.

Thankfully, Paul did not allow himself be flattered by his fans. Instead he corrected them by pointing out directly that they were not baptized in his name and that he, like Apollos, was merely a minister through whom they had believed, that they were complementary co-workers planting and watering, with God being the one who gives the increase (1 Cor 1:12–13; 3:4–7).

As we reflect on these challenges faced in the early church, we must recognize that Satan will try various means to stir up differences between members in the church. It may be one nationality against another, or one age group against another, or people who speak one language against another. There is no end to the differences we can find. We must remember that we are one after we have been baptized into Christ, with no more distinction between Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female (Gal 3:27–28). If we were to be less sensitive and suspicious, we would not be easily stirred up, like the Hellenists, to believe that we are being systemically victimized and hence, have the need to band together with "fellow victims" to create a faction in church. Similarly, we must exercise extra caution not to fall into the trap of "hero-worshipping" any church workers.

As we observe how Satan has worked within families, among co-workers, and within the church, let us stay vigilant and endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph 4:3). ★

Care More, Pray More, Serve More

Nathanael Kuo – Washington, D.C., USA

In the name of Jesus Christ, I testify of God's grace to our campus fellowship during my senior year in college.

THE FELLOWSHIP AT UIUC

I was born and raised in New Jersey, USA, but in 2003, I moved away to attend college at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). UIUC is a remote area about two and a half hours drive from the nearest church in Chicago, but it had a True Jesus Church (TJC) campus fellowship of about ten believers. Every Sabbath we had service, comprising Bible studies on Friday evenings and Saturday afternoons, and sermon recordings on Saturday mornings. By God's grace, the fellowship continued from my first year (freshman) to my last year (senior) in college, although the number fluctuated as members came and went.

By my third year, we were down to five members. Yet the fellowship was still strong. I stayed with two other brothers, both of whom zealously served God. We would take turns to lead the Bible studies, and every Wednesday evening, we would pray together. Besides us, there were also two other members—an older sister from Taiwan studying in graduate school and a brother who had recently believed.

However, at the end of my third year, both roommates graduated and left. I suddenly realized there were only three of us remaining, barely enough to have Bible study together. Although the other two members were good members, they were not yet in the serving stage of their faith. The sister only attended services on Friday evenings, since she spent her time on Saturdays studying. The brother, a new believer, had just begun to attend services regularly. So when my last year at university came around, I harbored many negative feelings. I was scared because I thought I would be alone. I was under pressure because I felt that the responsibility of keeping the fellowship together rested upon me. I also resented God because there were no new undergraduate church members. I knew all along that it could happen, but I had always thought that God would provide; yet in the end, no one came.

THE STORY OF THE FIRST TRUTH-SEEKER

In August 2006, three of us congregated for our first Friday

evening meeting since term started. Although we knew it would be difficult with only three members, we were determined to continue. However, because we lacked manpower, we decided to have just one Bible study service per week on Friday evenings.

Around the same time, I also received the contact information of a potential truth-seeker. A friend's friend from Taiwan had come to study at UIUC, and I was asked to contact her because she might be interested to learn more about God. I had never invited a stranger to church before, but thank God, she readily accepted my invitation to attend the Friday night Bible study service.

The following Friday, the truth-seeker joined us for Bible studies. It was a little awkward at first, because there were only four of us and we were studying Matthew 1, on the genealogy of Jesus Christ. It did not seem to be a good first topic for a truth-seeker, but thank God, it turned out well, almost like a truth-seeker class, because we could ask her which names from the genealogy she recognized and introduced to her those characters she didn't know.

Before we concluded to pray, she shared with us that she was desperately looking for a sublessee. She had rented one apartment, but had to move out as she was given a cat as a gift, and pets were not allowed in this apartment. She rented another apartment, only to realize that she could not break her contract with the first apartment and ended up having to pay rentals for both apartments. As UIUC is a campus town, very few move into town after the semester starts. We were not really sure what to tell her; all we could say was that we would pray for her. The following week, when we picked her for Bible study, we were amazed to discover that she had already found a sublessee! I was really surprised that God answered our prayer so promptly.

THE STORY OF THE SECOND TRUTH-SEEKER

Several months later, in November, we had a Thanksgiving dinner together and the truth-seeker brought one of her friends along. We did not think much about it at the time, but after the Thanksgiving break, this friend also joined our Bible study service.

As the Bible study was ending, the second truth-seeker also shared her problem with us. The university had unfairly charged her an extra 3500 US dollars in tuition fees when she opted out of two classes and registered for another class. Despite her petition to the university's financial services, nothing had happened for two months; moreover, she incurred a late fee charge for not paying the original fee. Like we did with the first truth-seeker, we could only tell her that we would pray for her.

The following Monday, she went to the financial services office and asked me to accompany her. When we met with financial services staff, they realized the additional charge was actually due to a computer error. Therefore, this second truth-seeker was not responsible for the extra charge or the accompanying late fee. Once again, I was amazed that God answered these prayers so promptly. From then on, this second truth-seeker also started to join us consistently on Friday evenings.

THE STORY OF THE THIRD TRUTH-SEEKER

One Friday evening in January 2007, the first truth-seeker brought another friend. I then realized that our fellowship had doubled! When I pondered over this later, I was moved to tears. All this time, I had thought I was just there to survive this one year, but God gave us three truth-seekers. I was also very touched to see God abiding with us, and yet we had done nothing to deserve such grace.

When we were about to pray to conclude that Bible study service, like the two previous times, this third truth-seeker also shared her problem. After being in the graduate program for a semester, she was beginning to experience anxiety simply from being on campus. Again, her situation was difficult, and we had no idea what to do, but we decided we would pray about it. In the end, this third truth-seeker did not stay long because the answer to her prayer was to return home to Taiwan. Even so, during the two months that she stayed with us, she seemed to have peace whenever she joined us for Bible studies.

THE STORY OF THE SISTER

Besides the truth-seekers, God also showered much grace upon the other two members and me. One night in October of that senior year, I could not sleep because I was thinking about the older sister in the fellowship. Since she was nearly old enough to be my mother, I thought, if I saw my own mother working so hard and not attending services on Saturdays, would I not say something?

While I was thinking about it, this sister called and asked me if I could come by the following day to help her with a few things. The next day, after helping her, I blurted, "It would be really great if you could join us on Saturdays also." Although she felt bad about it, she told me she really needed her Saturdays to study. I thought I had tried my best, and I would leave it at that, since in the end, it was her choice.

After I left UIUC, a preacher visited her. Although I do not know the details, from that day forth, she started to attend Saturday morning services every week. The sister remembered that day I talked to her about joining Saturday services and how it was a turning point for her. Thank God, this sister's faith continued to grow while she was in the fellowship.

The purpose of the fellowship was fulfilled from its beginning to its end because it helped us to draw closer to God.

THE STORY OF THE BROTHER

I also saw how the faith of the other brother grew in our fellowships. He was baptized for only two years and had not yet been actively serving. But during my senior year, this brother became a real comfort to me by not just being a brother, but also a co-worker and friend. He opened his apartment for our fellowships, drove his car to pick truth-seekers, and even offered to help with leading Bible studies. However, since he did not have the Holy Spirit at that time and had little experience leading Bible studies, we decided that I would lead the Bible studies whenever I could.

After my graduation in May 2007, this brother was left with the sister and the two truth-seekers. I was worried because I wondered what would become of the fellowship after I left. That summer, he decided to attend the National Youth Theological Seminar (NYTS), and I also went as a counselor. We prayed earnestly that he would receive the Holy Spirit, because we knew that he would need the Holy Spirit in the year to come. Thank God, our prayers were answered. It was such perfect timing, for God gave him the Holy Spirit just in time to enable him to lead the campus fellowship. From then on, I felt relieved because I knew that God would take care of the fellowship through this brother.

THE END OF THE FELLOWSHIP

A year after I graduated, I returned to visit and attend the graduation ceremonies of the two truth-seekers. It turned out that the fellowship came to a perfect end, as everyone else left at roughly the same time. The two truth-seekers graduated on the same day and the sister completed her degree a couple of weeks afterwards. The brother who had taken up the fellowship also left that summer, deciding to transfer to a school closer to church.

Although the truth-seekers are not yet baptized, and the campus fellowship came to an end, God has blessed each fellowship member abundantly. However, I think the greatest blessing is that each of us grew so much spiritually. The purpose of the fellowship was fulfilled from its beginning to its end because it helped us to draw closer to God.

Throughout my senior year, I was burdened with many cares for myself, but also for the fellowship, and these made me pray more. Every day I would pray for each fellowship member, to the point I found it easy to fast and pray too. Because I prayed, I also found the wisdom and strength to do what I could to serve.

MY STORY—LESSONS LEARNED

As for me, I have learned lessons from the fellowship that year that will stay with me for my entire life. For one, I now understand that no situation is hopeless. Ephesians 3:20 tells us that God can do beyond what we ask or think. Second, "where two or three are gathered together in [His] name, [He will be] there in the midst of them" (Mt 18:20). Although we were few in numbers, every session of the Bible studies was filled with God's righteousness, peace and joy. Third, I saw that evangelism is actually easy when God is working. Sometimes, we worry about preaching, but it is really God who calls His people, not us. Fourth, to quote a hymn, "In Jesus Christ, we are all family." Indeed, we should be treating the believers like our own family members, since we are all connected by the blood of Christ.

But I think the most important lesson I learned was to care more, pray more, and serve more. Throughout my senior year, I was burdened with many cares for myself, but also for the fellowship, and these made me pray more. Every day I would pray for each fellowship member, to the point I found it easy to fast and pray too. Because I prayed, I also found the wisdom and strength to do what I could to serve. As Deuteronomy 6:5 says, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart (caring), with all your soul (praying), with all your strength (serving)." So all along, God was teaching me to care, to pray, and then to serve, but caring comes first.

Today, after many years, I still vividly remember the events during that senior year at UIUC and the lessons that I have learned. I still do not completely understand why God allowed us to experience Him so deeply that year, but I thank God for His incredible and amazing grace.

May all glory be given to God. Amen. ★

In the Sweet By and By

Lee Chor Sian—Singapore

Sister Lee Chor Sian hails from Alor Star, a town in northern Malaysia. She moved to Singapore in 2001 to live with her children after her late husband Bro Lew Sey Lou rested in the Lord in 2000. In this testimony, Sis Lee recounts the two dreams she had when her late husband fell seriously ill and shortly before he passed away.

Hallelujah, in the holy name of Jesus I bear testimony.

In July1989, my fifty-nine-year-old husband suffered a heart attack that left him in a coma. Sent to the hospital, he was immediately admitted to the Intensive Care Unit. The suddenness of the heart attack caught us completely off-guard. Up till then, he had always been very healthy, with no complaint of any sickness or pain. So it pained us to see him lying motionless in the Intensive Care Unit. But our resident preacher constantly encouraged me, "Rely on the Lord! Rely on the Lord!" Indeed, there was little we could do, so we entrusted everything to the Lord, asking for His mercy and help through prayer.

THE FIRST DREAM

After returning home from the hospital that night, I was unable to fall asleep, so I knelt down to pray. I asked God to protect and to preserve my husband's life, as I really could not bear him leaving us. Tears covered my face as I cried out, "Lord! Save him from his affliction." After I prayed, I got into bed and before I knew it, I had fallen asleep. I then had a dream where I saw myself holding hands with my husband, happily walking and singing the hymn "Praise Ye the Lord of Hosts" together. It was such a joy to sing. All of a sudden, I heard the sound of a choir and saw a very bright light illuminating the path, leading us to a very large, beautiful and bright garden. Inside the garden, there were many people wearing garments of pure white, and all of them were also singing the hymn we had been singing. However, when my husband and I were about to step into the garden, a voice suddenly said, "It is not time!" I shouted, "Hallelujah!" and awoke, realizing that it was a dream. My heart was filled with inexpressible joy! I knelt down to pray and was filled with the Holy Spirit, and I thought to myself, "Sey Lou, there's hope for you. The Lord Jesus has saved you!" The next day when I went to the hospital to visit him, he was already awake. All thanks to the grace of the Lord.

Besides my family, the brethren in Alor Star and Singapore had also been praying with one heart to ask for God's mercy, protection, and, by His will, the extension of my husband's life, as life is in the hands of God. The Lord knows our needs and He heard our cries. By the Lord's grace, my husband was allowed to live peacefully for another eleven years, to keep his faith and be blessed with health and happiness. God gave him three filial children and allowed him to see each of them grow up, establish a career and set up their own families. He became a father and also a grandfather. Indeed, God gave him bountiful blessings in his extra time!

THE SECOND DREAM

I had my second dream on the night of November 1, 2000. That day was our forty-second wedding anniversary. While chatting during the day, we talked about many

things, including church, family, and all the other important things in our life. My husband's heart was full of thanksgiving to the Lord for His guidance, peace, and blessing, and for our three filial children and their spouses. He said, "I am really contented. I have already reached a ripe old age of seventy. Now all I want is for the Lord Jesus to preserve my spiritual life so that I may enjoy my latter years in Him. I want to have a good rest." I told him that we were both old and indeed the most important thing was to keep our faith and look forward to the kingdom of heaven.

That night, I had another dream in which my husband and I were holding hands as we walked along. But when we arrived at our doorstep, he was suddenly missing. A very bright light shone on our house and the whole house lit up! I shouted aloud, "Hallelujah!" and woke up. Immediately, I knelt down to pray. Tears covered my face and I was filled with the Holy Spirit. I understood what the will of God was. God was preparing to take my husband home. God had heard his prayer and was going to answer it, allowing him to have a good rest in the best circumstances so that he would be free of any pain or worry.

On the morning of November 3, 2000, my husband appeared his usual healthy self. He went with me to the market; we met some friends and had a good chat and laugh together. When we reached home, he helped me to clean the house; then he read the newspaper, listened to some music, and chatted joyfully with our son, daughter-in-law and granddaughter who had come from Penang (they returned home every week to spend time with him). At slightly past 4 p.m., he complained of discomfort in his stomach so I got him to lie down. He did not eat anything but only took some medicine and drank a cup of water. I suggested going to consult the doctor later but his only answer to that was to ask me to pray. So we prayed together and

Sis. Lee Chor Sian and her late husband Bro. Lew Sey Lou (November 1999)

I heard him pray very loudly, filled with the Holy Spirit. After shouting Hallelujah thrice—the last shout being the loudest—he was silent. I quickly rose from prayer, looked at him and called out to him. He opened his eyes, looked at me whilst still holding my hands, closed his eyes and, just like that, departed peacefully. At that moment, I understood the will of God. It was time for him to return to the Lord. But God had taken him home so quickly! While I accepted God's wonderful will, being human, my heart was still filled with longing for him! I will always remember and miss him—a good husband, a good father, a good helper and brother in church.

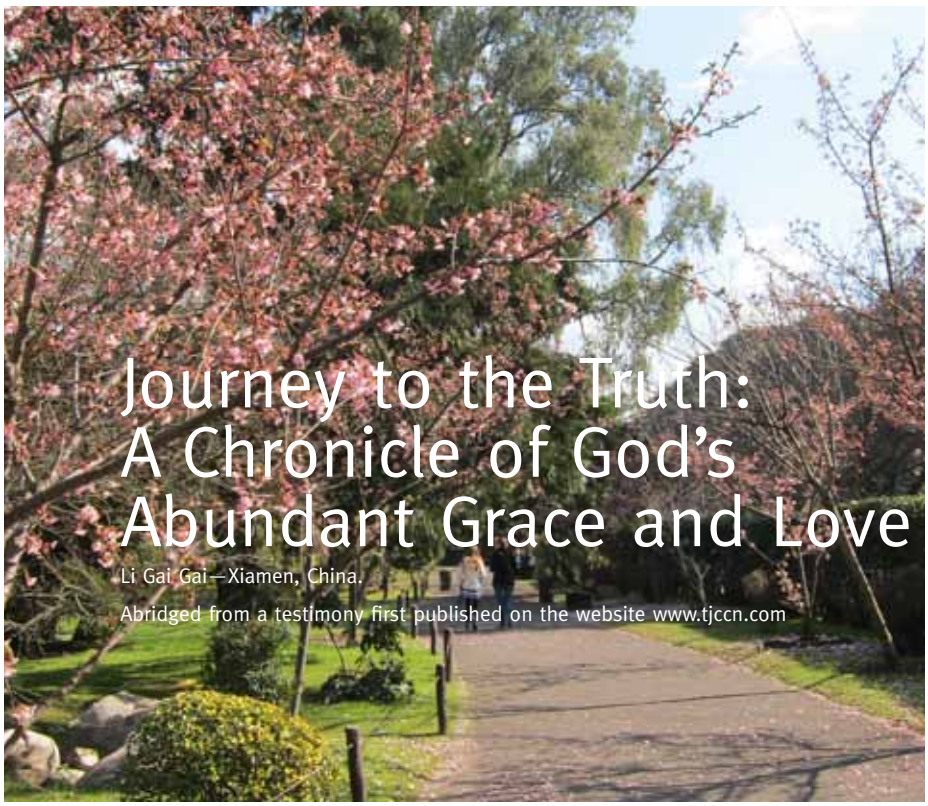
As humans, we would try to keep our loved ones by our side as long as possible. But the Lord knows better. In fact, the Lord knows the best time. Although I may have wanted my husband to tarry a while longer in this world with me, the Almighty Omniscient God decided that it was best to give him rest in a far better place.

Our God is a faithful God. He makes many promises to us through His word; we can say "amen" to all these—for they will all be fulfilled. Importantly, I know that there is a beautiful place awaiting us if we preserve our faith till the very end.

Our God is a loving and compassionate God. Like a good father, He will grant our request, if something is good for us and we ask for it with faith. After my husband's first heart attack, God hearkened to our request to sustain his life. Later, He fulfilled my husband's simple request of rest in Him. As for me, I am especially grateful for God's special gifts to me: He had prepared and comforted me through two special dreams, as well as the full motivation of the Holy Spirit as I prayed. He had provided a wonderful time for me to have a good talk with my husband and to witness my husband in his final prayer, being greatly filled by the Holy Spirit. Our God is indeed a wonderful merciful Savior.

May the grace and peace of God be with everyone. May all the glory and honor be given to our God in heaven. ★

As humans, we would try to keep our loved ones by our side as long as possible. But the Lord knows better. In fact, the Lord knows the best time. Although I may have wanted my husband to tarry a while longer in this world with me, the Almighty Omniscient God decided that it was best to give him rest in a far better place.



Journey to the Truth: A Chronicle of God's Abundant Grace and Love

Li Gai Gai—Xiamen, China.

Abridged from a testimony first published on the website www.tjccn.com

Sister Li Gai Gai was one of the theological students from the government-sanctioned Nanjing Union Theological Seminary who changed their church affiliation to the True Jesus Church while they were studying at the seminary in the 1990s. Here, she relates her journey to the truth.

FAITH NURTURED FROM YOUNG

I was born in 1971 into a Christian family who valued and emphasized religious education. Grandmother taught my siblings and me to sing hymns, read us Bible stories and prayed with us. Since we lived far away from a church, our house became a worship center for the family and believers who lived nearby. Through my grandmother's guidance, my participation in the gatherings, and personal reading of the Bible and other Christian literature, I built a strong Christian faith, culminating in a desire to dedicate my life to the Lord's service. During my junior high school years, Grandmother prayed often for me, beseeching the Lord to choose me as His vessel. Thus, when I was admitted to the government-sanctioned Nanjing Union Theological Seminary in 1991, I saw that as God's grace and plan for my life.

NANJING: INTRODUCTION TO TONGUES-SPEAKING

During my first year in the seminary, a dormitory mate from Northeast China and I went to the seminary's devotional room to pray. As we prayed, I heard my friend articulating unintelligible sounds; I could not understand a single word! Afterwards, she told me she was speaking in tongues, but when I curiously asked her how to do it, she did not tell me.

In 1992, my second year at the seminary, I discovered that one of my classmates, Ji Hong Mei, had visited the Sanshan[1] True Jesus Church in Fuqing, a city in China's Fujian province. Realizing that the teachings of the True Jesus Church (TJC) were the biblical truth, she had subsequently gone on to accept baptism in living water and become a TJC member. Hong Mei and I were often together. She would share TJC doctrines with me, but I rejected them, heatedly debating with her. Whenever she talked about TJC's five doctrines, I would try to refute them one by one.

As our winter break drew near, Hong Mei invited me to join her and several other college mates on a trip to the Sanshan TJC. Eager to find out more about TJC, I agreed. So during the winter break, ten people—my classmates, two other Christians from a Nanjing Christian worship point and I—traveled south to Fuqing.

FUQING: PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF THE SANSHAN TJC

After dinner on the day of our arrival at Sanshan, most of us went back to our rooms to sleep. However, one of my classmates, Liu Yao Yao, went to the second floor of the hall to pray as he was suffering from a cold. Unexpectedly, he received the Holy Spirit and started to speak in tongues! When I heard about this, I muttered

to myself: "How could Liu Yao Yao be so weak? He has just arrived at Sanshan. Without completing his due diligence to debate with TJC on their doctrines, he has been pulled over so easily!"

On the following day, Elder Wang Qin Ru studied the Bible with us. Although he provided supporting biblical evidence for each of the TJC's five essential doctrines and answered all our questions, I felt unconvinced by some of his answers. In between our Bible study sessions, we had sessions to pray for the Holy Spirit. We were taught to clasp our hands, begin our prayer in the holy name of the Lord Jesus, and then say "Hallelujah." When the prayer started, I stole a glance and to my surprise, the TJC members were articulating unintelligible sounds as their bodies and hands shook. I found their movements quite awkward. When Elder Wang came to lay hands on me, I quickly closed my eyes and pretended to pray earnestly. But I was actually not concentrating and hence, had no special experience when Elder Wang laid hands on me.

Over the many sessions of prayer for the Holy Spirit in the next few days, all my classmates either received the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues, or had been moved by the Holy Spirit. I was the only one who did not feel anything at all. As our visit neared its end, those who had received the Holy Spirit requested water baptism. Elder Wang then scheduled their baptism for the twenty-eighth day of the twelfth lunar month 1992. When I was asked whether I wanted to be baptized too, I replied that I would not accept baptism until the issue of the Holy Spirit was resolved.

RECEIVING THE HOLY SPIRIT

The days of searching through the Scriptures and praying for the Holy Spirit had reduced my psychological rejection of the true church, but I was still in a dilemma: the truth held by TJC was good, but I believed that my former faith was not wrong! Several of my classmates had already received the Holy Spirit, so how could I continue to doubt TJC? There was only one way—I knelt and beseeched God to allow me to receive the Holy Spirit if the beliefs of the true church were correct. I also told Him, "Dear Lord, if I do not have the Holy Spirit, please grant me the Holy Spirit; if I already have the Holy Spirit, then please lead me more clearly to serve You."

My classmates who had accepted the truth of the true church and received the Holy Spirit were also interceding for me. One of them, Lin Fang, would always kneel beside me and occasionally pause in his prayer to listen to my prayer, hoping to hear that I had received the Holy Spirit. However, though I was kneeling, I was not fully focused on my prayer.

The turning point was the eve of the water baptism. On that evening, I gathered with a few believers who had not received the Holy Spirit to pray. I prayed very earnestly, telling the Lord, "If I receive the Holy Spirit tonight, I shall request to be baptized tomorrow." That particular prayer was a long one, comprising six prayer sessions of more than half an hour each, so it ended at about 2 a.m. the next day. After the fourth session, everyone, except myself and another lady, had received the Holy Spirit or had been moved by the Holy Spirit. Then, during the fifth prayer session where everyone was interceding for me, my arms began to tingle from the wrist to the elbow and soon began to shake on their own accord. Terrified, I clasped my hands tightly in order to prevent the vigorous movement, but to no avail. I had been uttering "Hallelujah" but then my tongue began to roll, and I was making sounds similar to someone who had received the Holy Spirit. Lin Fang, who was kneeling beside me, heard me speak in tongues and shouted excitedly, "She's got it, she's got it!" Elder Wang then ended the prayer. Everyone rejoiced to see that the most stubborn skeptic had received the Holy Spirit! During the sixth prayer session, I was truly filled with the Holy Spirit. Joyful and at peace, I decided to accept water baptism the following day.

RECEIVING WATER BAPTISM

The next day—the twenty-eighth day of the twelfth lunar month—Elder Wang, my classmates and I as well as a dozen other believers drove to Gaoshan town seaside. The weather was cold and the winds gusty. Seeing our group of young people that included several thin and fragile-looking ladies willing to brave the cold weather to receive water baptism, the local TJC members gave praise to God. God took good care of us because not a single one of us caught a cold although we were completely immersed in the chilly water.

After baptism, we spent about ten days visiting several other True Jesus Churches in the province of Fujian. These visits left me with the general impression of a vibrant church—the brethren loved God and one another, were spiritually strong, and fervent in prayer. In addition, the TJC congregations had so many young believers including children who participated enthusiastically in church activities.

NANJING: ESTABLISHING THE NANJING TJC

On our return to Nanjing, the group of us who had visited Fuqing immediately changed our church affiliation to True Jesus Church,

I was still in a dilemma: the truth held by TJC was good, but I believed that my former faith was not wrong! Several of my classmates had already received the Holy Spirit, so how could I continue to doubt TJC? There was only one way—I knelt and beseeched God to allow me to receive the Holy Spirit if the beliefs of the true church were correct.

triggering a storm in the seminary. As the college enrolment was slightly more than a hundred, our group of around ten actually accounted for nearly ten percent of the community, and we also had a certain amount of influence in the college. Nervous about this development, the college administrators organized many lectures, addressing topics such as sectarian issues, the Holy Spirit, and speaking in tongues. The lecturers were also actively initiating conversations with us. As Nanjing Union Theological Seminary was known as a Christian human resource base, any sign of trouble would immediately attract the attention of the China Christian Council (CCC) and the National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China (TSPM), the two Chinese government-sanctioned Protestant organizations. Our conversion to TJC was soon reported in the Chinese Protestant Churches' flagship magazine "Tian Feng," and subsequent issues discussed topics related to the Holy Spirit and tongues-speaking.

However, this external pressure actually drew us even closer, and we made it a point to meet at the seminary's chapel every Wednesday at 9 p.m. to pray together to beseech the Lord to increase our faith and strengthen our belief. We also made a concerted effort not to partake of the Holy Communion at the seminary and not to attend the Sunday services, but to keep the Sabbath instead. With God's guidance and protection, and seeing our determination and unity, the seminary did not take any action against us. Our fellow-students were sympathetic towards us; they understood and respected our decision to change. In fact, some were even interested in finding out more about TJC from us.

Mdm Luo Xiao Xia was a Christian in charge of one of the Nanjing worship centers. She had visited the Fujian TJC churches together with us. After she received the truth, she immediately preached to all the believers at this worship center. Their conversion to TJC marked the beginning of the Nanjing TJC. Every week our group of theological students would take turns to deliver sermons to this congregation.

In the afternoon, I expounded on the Holy Spirit, and explained the relationship between the Holy Spirit and salvation as well as the signs and evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit. After this sharing, we had a session to pray for the Holy Spirit. I prayed, "Dear Lord, please allow at least one person to receive the Holy Spirit today as a sign that the True Jesus Church that you have established is indeed the true church, so that everyone can believe and obey." That afternoon, a total of five ladies received the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues!

XIAMEN: ASSIGNED TO WORK

In my fourth year at the seminary, I changed rooms. One of my new roommates was Kou Ke Hua[2] who had also converted to TJC. One day, while chatting about our post-graduation plans, Ke Hua remarked that it would be great if we could both work for the True Jesus Church. I was considering returning to Hebei, but there was no TJC there. On enquiry, however, it turned out that Xiamen TJC did indeed need a preacher. I prayed to God for guidance before I decided. By His will, everything went smoothly, and I arrived in Xiamen TJC in October 1995. Later, God also led Ke Hua to work in Xiamen TJC.

HEBEI: GUIDING HOMETOWN FOLKS TO THE TRUTH

After serving nearly two years in the ministry of Xiamen TJC, I felt the need to preach TJC, the ark of the last days, to my family and the others who attended the worship center at my home. Due to my earlier lack of knowledge and understanding regarding the true church, I had only shared the truth that TJC preached with my father and prayed with him to receive the Holy Spirit; I had not emphasized the need for him to be converted to TJC. With this thought of converting all who attended my home church to TJC, I began to fast and pray every morning, asking God to open the way and help me achieve that.

One month later, in April, I returned to my hometown in Hebei province to visit family and relatives. Requested to deliver a sermon on the first Sunday morning, I talked about the Sabbath, recounting how, historically, the Catholic Church had changed the observance of Sabbath day to Sunday. Hearing this, the Christians gathering at my home church immediately decided to observe the Sabbath from the following week. In the afternoon, I expounded on the Holy Spirit, and explained the relationship between the Holy Spirit and salvation as well as the signs and evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit. After this sharing, we had a session to pray for the Holy Spirit. I prayed, "Dear Lord, please allow at least one person to receive the Holy Spirit today as a sign that the True Jesus Church that you have established is indeed the true church, so that everyone can believe and obey." That afternoon, a total of five ladies received the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues! My mother was the first to receive the Holy Spirit.

Over the next few Sabbath services, I went on to explain the truth of salvation concerning water baptism, Holy Communion, foot washing, etc. After listening to these doctrines, about twenty to thirty people immediately voiced their desire to receive water baptism in the true church. After I contacted Preacher Chen Jianlin, he and Deacon Chen Huai Zhong (from Zhangpu Church) took the long journey to our Handan Town Mining District in Hebei Province to baptize these truth seekers.

We truly enjoyed the Lord's miraculous guidance, even in the smallest matter! For example, I had given instructions to purchase fifty cups for use in the post-baptism Holy Communion service, since about forty people were getting baptized. However, at the shop, the owner found he had just two additional cups left in the store after our purchase, so he gave these to us for free. Little did we expect that when we conducted the Holy Communion that day, exactly fifty-two partook of the bread and cup! God is indeed the omniscient and loving Father, even preparing the exact number of cups for us!

PROCLAIMING GOD'S POWER AND LOVE

Similarly, during the baptism sacrament, there was clear evidence of God's mighty hand. Even though more than half of those who received baptism were elderly, none of them caught a cold. A seriously-ill elderly couple was among the baptismal candidates. Although they normally had great difficulty moving around, this couple came up from the water, relaxed and happy.

In addition, when an elderly lady entered the water to be baptized, Deacon Chen and my father (who was assisting the deacon) detected a fragrance, totally unlike man-made perfume. When the elderly lady was later asked whether she had been using perfume, she said: "At this age, why would I still be using such things?" We concluded then that this was the Lord's doing—providing the fragrant aroma as sign that the baptism was consistent with His will and manifesting His abidance.

Later that year, in November, Preacher Lin Fang, Preacher Wang Hongli and I conducted a two-day spiritual convocation in Hebei. After the spiritual convocation, eight men and women asked to be baptized. Several of them were very old, with one of them being over seventy years old. The end of the year was a period that was usually cold in Northern China; but that year the weather was colder than normal. To test their faith, I asked whether they were worried about catching a cold. Their simple answer—"We have confidence that God will protect us and keep us from the cold"—moved me immensely. Indeed, by God's wonderful grace, despite the cold weather, none of them caught a cold. Among them was an old sister who, for the past twenty years, could only lie on her side in bed; after baptism, she could sleep normally and lie on her back. Another sister had severe heart disease, but the full immersion did not affect her at all, and she came up out of the water joyfully.

After the spiritual convocation, the believers grew in their faith in the true church and in their love for the Lord. Today, TJC in the Hebei region continues to flourish by God's grace. Amen. ★

1 Sanshan is a town within the city of Fuqing.

2 Kou Ke Hua, later ordained as a deacon, has been called to rest by the Lord in Beijing on January 17, 2012.

A Brief Introduction to the UK churches

HISTORY

Believers who are unaffiliated with a church and unable to have fellowship with other brethren are like branches that cannot bear fruit. This was the situation for the first few isolated members and families who came to the United Kingdom (UK). Gradually, these brethren grew in faith and fervency, and eventually established the UK churches and the General Assembly of the United Kingdom (UKGA), but the road to this point of development was long and hard.

True Jesus Church members from Malaysia first migrated to the UK for study and work in 1950. Starting from January 1960, members from Hong Kong Island, the New Territories and Ap Chau followed. Initially, the majority of these migrants were single brothers, who worked extremely hard for a living. They were scattered in different places and did not gather together at first, but through the encouragement of some early workers from overseas, the brethren gradually came together for worship. Gathering places, prayer houses, and eventually churches were established. Today, there are nine churches and over two thousand members spread across the UK.

THE EARLY YEARS

While they were working or studying in the UK, members continued to uphold their faith by gathering in their own homes. In London, the brethren were few in number, yet they continued to meet at several different locations for Sabbath services over the years. Venues of worship during the sixties and seventies included Plaistow (1966), Chiswick (1970), Bounds Green (1972), and Holloway (1975).

In the north of the UK, where many Ap Chau members resided, Sabbath services were infrequent in the early 1970s. In 1972, Brother Shi-Hung Hsiao (Deacon Roung-Kuang Hsiao) of Taiwan, then a student in Germany, was invited by the International Assembly (IA) to join Brother Keith Horn (an Englishman baptized in Taiwan) in visiting the UK members before returning to Taiwan. At Newcastle, they discussed the importance of observing the Sabbath, the issues of selecting suitable leaders, worshipping venues and so on. Particular emphasis was placed upon the importance of Sabbath worship. Subsequently, a service, led by Deacon Paul Tang, was held for the first time in a member's restaurant and was attended by more than fifty believers.

Gatherings were typically held at members' takeaways and restaurants. For example, in Sunderland, initial gatherings took place in Brother Kai Pou Liu's restaurant. In London, services were held on the first floor of the "Tin Tin Restaurant" in Chinatown from 1976 onwards. Starting from 1975, regular Sabbath services were also held in Leicester at the takeaway shop of a brother. And near Portsmouth, the first Sabbath service was held at a brother's restaurant in Bognor Regis in 1977.

THE FORMATIVE YEARS

As membership gradually increased, the constraints and difficulties associated with holding family services began. In Sunderland, holding classes in a takeaway shop caused complaints from the neighbors and prompted investigations by the police. As a result, the venue had to be moved repeatedly. In Sunderland and Leicester, hired halls were used for services and Religious Education (RE) classes, whereas in Newcastle, members had to rent the premises of the Central Methodist Church.

Membership in the various locations

grew and prayer churches were set up in the early 1970s. With forty members, the Sunderland prayer house was established in 1972. In the same year, the Cambridge prayer house was formed, followed by the Newcastle prayer house with two hundred members in 1973. Prayer houses were further established in Edinburgh in 1976 and Portsmouth and Leicester in 1978.

Initially, services were rudimentary in form. For example, because of a lack of service leaders in Edinburgh, services simply consisted of hymn-singing, prayer and Bible-reading. As the membership increased and the members became more mature in their faith, the responsibilities of the prayer house extended to members in neighboring towns, such as Dundee, Prestwick, and Elgin. Members visited one another and helped to lead family services.

In August 1975, Deacon Cephas Yau from Hong Kong visited the members in the UK and helped with the pastoral work in Newcastle, Sunderland, and Edinburgh. Although there were as many as seven hundred members living in the UK at the time, they did not own a church building. Following Deacon Yau's continuous reminders to take action to acquire a church building, the first True Jesus Church in the UK was dedicated to the Lord in Newcastle on July 12, 1976. This was also the first true church established in Europe, and the name of the Lord was greatly exalted. Sunderland and Edinburgh followed suit in July 1979, London in 1983, Leicester in 1984, Elgin in 1985, and Portsmouth in 1989.

As the churches grew and prayer houses turned into churches, members became increasingly zealous in participating in divine work. For example, Leicester Church bought a place of worship in Peterborough, a city in a neighboring region, to ensure regular services could take place in the area. As the number of members increased, many churches either moved or extended their existing buildings. For example, Sunderland Church relocated and expanded its premises in 1982 and 1994, respectively. A constant stream of members from other parts of the world increased the number of members in London to 175 in 1992; therefore, the church moved to a nearby five-storey building at Old Street in 1996. In 1994, Edinburgh Church decided to branch out; the new church, which comprised about 250 members, kept the name of Edinburgh Church, while the former church, which had a membership of 180, was renamed Gifford Park Church. Similarly, London Church decided to establish a church in South London. After eight years, four moves, and three unsuccessful bids for church properties, Forest Hill Church in South London was finally established in 2012. In addition to this, a four-storey building for Leicester Church was dedicated in July 2013.

Thanks to the recent influx of members from mainland China, we now have many gathering places in the UK, including those in Glasgow, Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds. In Cardiff, which also started out as a gathering place, membership grew and a prayer house was thus established in 2011.

PASTORING WORK PRIOR TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE UKGA

In July 1977, the IA sent Deacon Simon Hsu to the UK for six months of practical training. At the time, youths who had previously participated in the RE work in Hong Kong's Kowloon Church also assisted in the divine work. Under the guidance of God, each UK church made plans for further advancement, and a national conference for ministers and church board members was held in Newcastle that same year. A resolution to request that the IA send a preacher to assist in the divine work in the UK was reached. Thank God, as a result, Deacon Hsu was dispatched to pastor the UK churches for one year. In November 1983, in light of the need for a resident preacher for the Newcastle and Sunderland churches, Preacher Aun-Quek Chin was invited by these two churches to help out with the pastoral work.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

On October 24, 1989, a National Church Delegates Conference was held at Newcastle Church. Its main purpose was to discuss the establishment of a General Assembly (GA). After the delegates had voted in favor of the proposal, thirteen members were elected to serve on the General Assembly board. A committee responsible for drafting the by-laws, rules, and regulations was also elected. Following lengthy discussions by the first GA board, a formal set of rules and regulations was adopted for all the UK churches.

In the beginning, UKGA workers focused on encouraging the middle-aged members to return to the Lord. At the same time, they tried to give care and guidance to the younger generation. The Youth Theological Training Course (YTTC) was set up in July 1991 to train and prepare potential workers for future church development. In addition, the Youth Coordination Centre was established in 1992, and a full-time preacher was assigned to care for the UK youths.

In 2003, the UKGA enhanced the care of members' families and the counseling of married couples by emphasizing the importance of family life and practical faith. Since

Churches since 1997, eight years after the UKGA was established:

Year	No. of churches/prayer houses/gathering places	Total Membership	No. of deacons & deaconesses	No. of preachers
1997	8 / 1 / 5	1865	56	3
2000	8 / 1 / 6	1956	52	4
2004	8 / 1 / 8	2198	53	5
2008	8 / 1 / 9	2608	51	5
2012	9 / 2 / 7*	2690	52	6

* Excludes Dublin.

2011, the UKGA has been reminding the UK members to turn their hearts back to God so that they will not follow the trends of the world and drift away from their faith.

The number of full-time preachers in the UK has increased from three in 1997 to six in 2012. However, we are still short of manpower because of the heavy workload in the pioneering areas, both in the UK and abroad. Most of the time and energy of our preachers is spent on either evangelistic or training work, leaving very little time for pastoral work. The care of the local churches has been left to their church board members, with IA workers providing some assistance.

As of December 2012, a total of nine churches and two prayer houses have been established in the UK, with a total membership of 2,690. There are currently thirty-four deacons, eighteen deaconesses and six preachers. May the almighty and merciful Lord continue to guide and support us.

CURRENT CHALLENGES AND DEVELOPMENTS

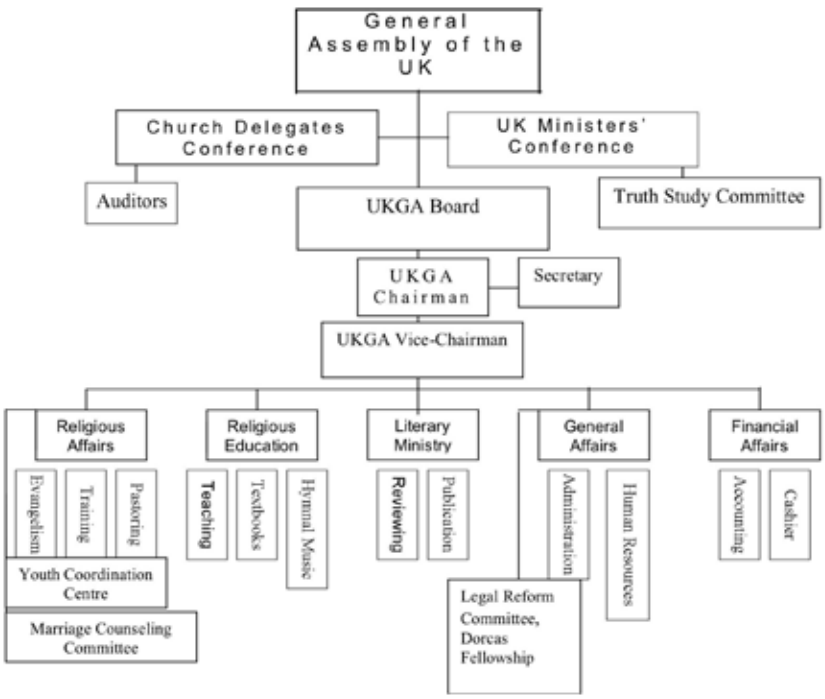
The slow growth of the UK membership may be due to the fact that most modern families living in the West nowadays opt to raise at most one or two children. In addition, the church has always encouraged members to preach and spread the gospel; however, as a result of the older generation's limited ability to communicate in English and a general lack of understanding of the Bible amongst the brethren, it has been difficult to preach to non-Chinese people. Efforts towards this end need to be strengthened with the help of our Lord. Our children and youths are the future of the church, so we hope the next generation will be able to do a better job than we have. Thank God, many UK youths have had the opportunity to experience work in pioneering areas and have realized its value because of volunteer-training seminars, particularly the Africa Voluntary Workers Missionary Training (AVWMT).

The UK membership has increased markedly since 2004, when many brethren began to migrate to the UK from Fujian, China. While the increasing number of brethren from China has helped the growth of the church in many ways, it has made pastoral work more difficult, as many of the Chinese brethren have no fixed abode and are often scattered around the country, receiving no support from local churches. The establishment of a coordinating committee has improved communication and coordination among these Chinese brethren. We continue to encourage them to establish places of worship to facilitate regular services and fellowships. The goal would be to develop these places of worship into prayer houses. For example, Sabbath services amongst a small number of believers started in Cardiff in 2007, with workers from other churches assisting in the pastoral, training, and evangelistic work. We thank the Lord that the membership grew and a prayer house with fifty-five members was established in 2011.

Another challenge that the UK churches are facing is a shortage of workers. The increase in the number of gathering places such as those in Manchester, Birmingham, Belfast and Dublin has led to a greater need for speakers, interpreters, and RE teachers. Additionally, the UKGA is responsible for the African ministry and the pastoral work in many European countries, which require the involvement of many workers. In order to meet these challenges, the UKGA has encouraged retired and gifted brethren, ministers, and YTTC graduates to participate in church work. In addition, more training opportunities have been established: the duration of the YTTC has been increased from three to four years, and in 2011, an annual adult theological training course was introduced. These take place in addition to the annual AVMT and regular pastoral training for church workers.

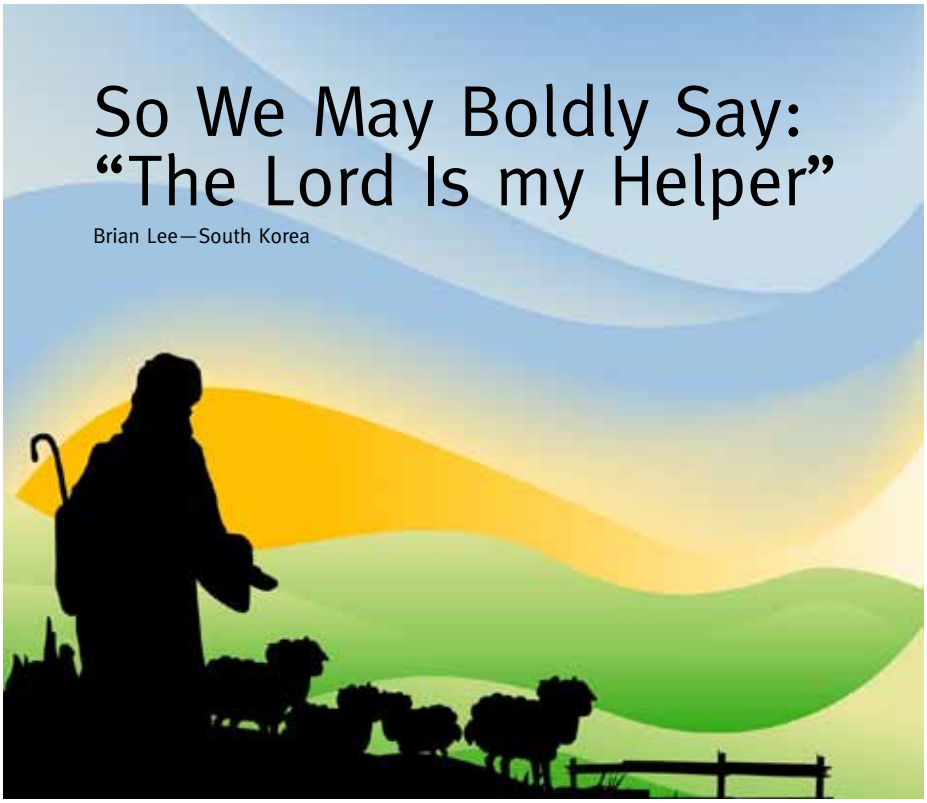
Through the grace and guidance of God, following the efforts of the UKGA and all the UK churches, the members in the UK are gradually being transformed and strengthened in their faith. May all glory and praise be given to God! ★

True Jesus Church UKGA Organization Chart



So We May Boldly Say: "The Lord Is my Helper"

Brian Lee—South Korea



Hallelujah, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ I testify. I am from South Korea. Korea is not simply a country of K-pop with stars like Girls Generation or Super Junior; it is a country full of God's grace. Just like in any other part of the world, God is present among us. I would like to share with you how God guided me during my military service in Korea.

Korea is a divided country and men who are over eighteen years old must do military service for a year and nine months. The military service is not easy. Nowadays, it is a lot better, but previously, everyone had to suffer beatings, insults and wrongdoings from senior officers or senior soldiers. From young, I have heard many negative stories about military service, so I was quite afraid to enter the army.

PREPARING FOR MILITARY SERVICE

One Sabbath, when I was in twelfth grade, I met a brother who was doing military service. The next week and the week after, the brother continued to attend Sabbath service. I was really surprised that he could do so while serving in the military. It turned out that he had applied to be an officer, which allowed him to take some days off on weekends. To be an officer, you have to serve for two years and six months, but you have more freedom. I decided to do the same and began to pray for this matter. I prayed for three years. Then a year before applying, I started to prepare for the officer training entrance test. I woke up at six every morning, exercised for one hour, and then studied military science.

I went through all this preparation for the officer exam because I wanted to keep the Sabbath. I felt that if I did not go to church once a week, I would not be able to endure the harsh military life. But my parents were not very happy. At that time I was studying at Seoul National University of Education to become a teacher. They thought that by preparing for the officer exam, I would fail in my studies to become a teacher. Thanks to God's grace, I passed both the officer exam and the exam to become a teacher; a rare happening at that time in Korea.

LUCKY BRIAN?

Finally, it was time to join the army. I was sent to serve in a place near town, while many were sent far away to the countryside. It was as if out of one hundred people, ninety-nine were sent to Iraq and I was sent close to New York. So everyone envied me. Some asked if my dad worked in the army, but it was not the case. It is just that I had God watching over me, because I am His child. Luke 12:28 says, "If then God so clothes the grass, which today is in the field and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will He clothe you, O you of little faith? And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind." Through this event, I could experience that God, the heavenly father, knows my situation better than anyone in this world, and He knows what is best for me.

My unit was a twenty-minutes car drive away from the nearest True Jesus Church. As an officer, I needed to be on duty during some weekends, but, thank God, through prayers, I was granted permission to go to church every Saturday. When my friends learned of this, they started calling me Lucky Brian. But was I really lucky?

YOUTH

Because I had much work and training, I could not sleep more than four hours a day. My mind and my body became tired—but God trained me. I woke up early in the morning and prayed in another room or underneath the blanket. Sometimes, while I was undergoing training, I would say a quick prayer in the bathroom. I carried a small Bible with me, and read a chapter every day.

TRAINED AND SUSTAINED BY GOD

As an officer, I had thirty soldiers under my command. All had serious problems. Some were affected by troubled single-parent family backgrounds, while others even had criminal records. I do not discriminate against them, but they tend to be relatively more unstable and insecure. People called my platoon the "bomb platoon"; they felt that something could go wrong at any time.

In addition, I worked together with my senior officer in the same unit. He was very harsh in character. From day one, he interfered with everything I did and made me do his work. Whenever he could, he insulted me and verbally attacked me. I also had to share a room with him. Usually, after training, I would return to my room around 11 p.m. If I went to bed before him, he would play his K-pop music very loudly or talk to me. He was also obsessed with cleanliness; in the summer, I could not open the window because he didn't want dust in the room. I had to do all the cleaning, laundry, and cooking, which is how I learned to cook very well. Even though he mistreated me, I obeyed him. I did not resist or file a complaint to my superiors because in Ephesians 6:5, we are encouraged to "be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ."

During this period, I also had to go to drinking parties. Initially, there were lots of drinking parties, sometimes up to four a week. The army in Korea has a very authoritative culture. If your superior tells you to do something, you have to obey him, even after your shift is over. That's the rule. So I had to attend these drinking parties, but I never drank any alcohol because I am God's child. However, merely having to attend these parties was very stressful. But God helped me avoid drinking parties. There would often be parties when I was on leave or sent to another place for training.

Once, there was a drinking party while I was on duty. The partygoers became very drunk and caused some trouble; everyone except me were punished. In 1 Corinthians 10:13, Paul says: "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it." Through the trials and temptations that I had to encounter, committing my way to the Lord was my way of escape.

Because I had much work and training, I could not sleep more than four hours a day. My mind and my body became tired, but God trained me. I woke up early in the morning and prayed in another room or underneath the blanket. Sometimes, while I was undergoing training, I would say a quick prayer in the bathroom. I carried a small Bible with me, and read a chapter every day. God's Spirit and word enabled me to endure my military service. I did my best in my duties and God guided me and answered my prayers.

THE LORD IS MY HELPER

After two and a half years, miraculously, the soldiers who were under my command were discharged without any problems. The senior officer who harassed me failed to be promoted and had to spend the rest of his military service in another location under a senior officer who treated him worse.

Today, I have been discharged safely, and I am able to share God's grace with you. So, do you think I am lucky? Should I be called Lucky Brian? Let us read Nehemiah 4:9: "Nevertheless we made our prayer to our God, and because of them we set a watch against them day and night." Nehemiah prayed and guarded the wall day and night. In the church of God, there is no such thing as luck. We live under God's grace. Yet we cannot simply live under such grace without putting in any effort. We have to pray day and night, be on our guard and strive to receive His grace. Despite the tribulations and temptations we face, through steadfast prayers and through our good conduct, we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper" (Heb 13:6). May we all be filled with God's wonderful grace. ★

I Grieve with You in Pain

Patricia Chen—Irvine, California, USA

FACING GRIEF

Life has times of prosperity and times of adversity, times of joy and times of sorrow. Ultimately, everyone will, at some point, face burdens, loss, fear, or anxiety. In our darkest, most anguished hours, how do we handle our emotions?

Different people associate different things with loss and anguish. To some, it means having days when putting one foot in front of the other feels difficult; accepting the love, care and hugs of friends seems impossible. To others it means crawling into bed at night, curling into a ball, and crying, echoing pain and grief in the Psalms (e.g., Psalm 6:6, "I make my bed swim … with my tears").

AT A LOSS FOR WORDS

Last year in August, I received news from a friend telling me that her father had suddenly passed away. I could hear my heart racing as my mind struggled to comprehend what I had just heard. The news parched my throat. I paused, unsure of what to say. Eventually, I managed to mutter, "I am so sorry to hear that." I wanted to communicate something from my heart, but mere words seemed inadequate. I wanted to reassure her that even though I might not have understood all that she was going through, I knew that it must be awful and sorrowful beyond description.

Not long after, another sister told me that her mother had been admitted to hospital, and without any warning, passed away there. Again, taken aback by the news, I didn't know what to say. Deep down inside, I wanted to genuinely comfort her, but no words seemed fit for someone facing a mountain of grief.

Sometimes, in moments like these, we don't know what to say or how to comfort. We simply freeze. There does not seem to exist any magical word that can remove the mixture of feelings brewing inside someone who grieves.

EXPERIENCING GRIEF FIRST HAND

About three months after I received the news about the sister's mother, I personally experienced uncertainties and anxieties. A dear family member seemed to be nearing the end of his life, with his health rapidly deteriorating. Initially, I panicked. The uncertainty crippled me. I became empathetic towards the pain of the sisters who were still going through the valley of weeping—it was as if their pain were mine. I began to ponder the fear, anxiety, and sorrow of losing a loved one—indeed, the pain was deep and immense. I realized that my words seemed empty back then because I was frightened by their pain and grief.

HEALING THROUGH THE POWER OF PRAYER

This trial forced me to confront my emotions: worry, fear, grief, and anxiety. I was aware of their existence, but I didn't know how to identify them, thinking that I was strong enough to hold everything in. Yet I knew that I desperately needed a state of inner peace separate from my circumstances and emotions.

Many people bottle up their emotions when they don't know how to handle them. However, these uncomfortable emotions can resurface and plague us if they are not dealt with. We must seek a release that will let us adequately deal with them.

During a Bible study on Jesus' prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, it dawned on me that all the fear and sorrow I felt had also been felt by the Lord Jesus when He prayed

in the garden. Matthew 26:37 and Mark 14:33 both mention that Jesus became sorrowful, troubled, and "deeply distressed" in prayer. "And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Lk 22:44). Lastly, Jesus prayed, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done" (Mt 26:42). The Bible describes Jesus as someone grieved and distressed, so much so that His soul was "exceedingly sorrowful, even to death" (Mt 26:38).

Although Jesus was in agony, the Bible states that He entrusted everything to God in prayer: His prayer was not to avoid death but to find the strength to cope with what was coming. At that agonizing moment, Jesus turned to God and made God His focus.

With that realization, I knew I needed to pray. Isaiah 55:6 reminds us to "[s]eek the Lord while He may be found, [c]all upon Him while He is near." Through prayer I began to understand that if I tried to solve my problems by myself, God couldn't be glorified in my weakness—I would not be allowing God to display His might. Only through prayer can we endure agony, because it is God who strengthens us.

Indeed, turning to God in prayer and experiencing His peace was the exact prescription needed for my fear-ridden heart and mind. Philippians 4:6–7 states, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

When I started praying, even though my circumstances didn't change, I could feel the peace of God filling my heart in a way beyond my understanding. At the end of the prayer, I felt renewed and strengthened through the power of the Holy Spirit. Regardless of any uneasy emotions, I could rest assured and be certain of a God on whom I could trust and rely.

God will not let us suffer alone. "Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Rom 8:26). Whether we are on the peak of the mountain or in the depths of the valley, God is with us. Through our loss ... through any loss, He is near.

CARRY EACH OTHER'S BURDENS

Sometimes, we neglect to grieve with our friends and loved ones. However, the Bible encourages us to "bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal 6:2).

Through praying in the Holy Spirit, I found an outlet for my emotional responses to life's experiences. Yes, I may feel anxious or sorrowful towards a particular incident, but I can also have joy. Joy in knowing that God can lift us up with His grace. The Bible also tells us that we should not grieve without hope (1 Thess 4:13), because Jesus has risen from the dead, and He gives the hope of resurrection to all who believe in Him.

I decided I would make every effort to sincerely empathize with those who were grieving. No pain is so deep, so long-standing, that the love of God cannot reach. No wound is too trivial for God's love to heal.

BECOME A CHANNEL OF HEALING FOR OTHERS

In the Gospel of John, Jesus showed Thomas and the other disciples His nail-pierced hands and spear-pierced side. Sometimes, I wonder why those marks remained on His risen body. Was it so His friends could identify Him? Surely. But I believe there is a deeper meaning: when our wounds are healed, the marks remain so that we can become testimonies for our Lord Jesus Christ. We no longer feel despair because of the marks of our pain. Rather, the healed wounds become channels of healing for others.

In the process of inner healing, Jesus will gradually set us free to be a comfort for those in need. Jesus did not rebuke men, women, and children who came to Him with their needs—whether it was hunger, illness, or other problems. He met people where they were. He fed them, healed them, and received them fully and compassionately.

"But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; [t]he chastisement for our peace was upon Him, [a]nd by His stripes we are healed." (Isa 53:5)

GIVING SUPPORT IN TIMES OF GRIEF

When my sister was going through a severe sickness, a few church members visited her to comfort her and to let her know that they were there for her. Spiritually, their presence was powerful, and their persistent and intercessory prayers at her house were much more meaningful than a text or phone call.

So, to sensitively reach out and support those who are grieving, we first need to make contact. Tell them that you care and that you are praying for them; say, with sincerity, "If there is anything I can do, just let me know."

In some situations, it might be appropriate to pray together, asking God for strength, faith, and peace.

God will not let us suffer alone. "Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Rom 8:26). Whether we are on the peak of the mountain or in the depths of the valley, God is with us. Through our loss ... through any loss, He is near.

In some situations, it might be appropriate to pray together, asking God for strength, faith, and peace. Never underestimate the power of prayer. The Bible sometimes depicts the Holy Spirit as fine olive oil. Like a lubricant, the Holy Spirit will work in the heart of the afflicted: "He heals the brokenhearted [a]nd binds up their wounds" (Ps 147:3).

Never underestimate the power of prayer. The Bible sometimes depicts the Holy Spirit as fine olive oil. Like a lubricant, the Holy Spirit will work in the heart of the afflicted: "He heals the brokenhearted [a]nd binds up their wounds" (Ps 147:3).

God is love, and He will respond to our prayers through His word to encourage and empower us. There is healing in God's word. Scripture can calm people. Sometimes, that's all that people caught in crisis need.

We can also help practically by preparing meals, do grocery shopping, clean around the house etc. As important as spiritual intercession is, practical support should not be overlooked either.

Pain does not go away easily, so, we need to support those who are hurting. Every person is different and every relationship is unique; indeed, we need to respect the time and space of those who suffer. When they are ready, allow them to freely express their emotions, because they are part of a normal grief response. It is vital to help them identify their feelings and express them, instead of burying them.

When our grieving friends are ready to share, avoid making judgments or put downs. Try not to say too much; with love, a hug or a comforting hand on the shoulder can say more than words at times. Keep questions to a minimum; just listen. Even though we may not understand, we need to listen and guide.

However, while we encourage and comfort, we may also have to highlight the need to repent and change, especially, if the person's plight is the result of his or her sins. In such a case, we need to point out to our friends that true comfort comes from repenting one's wrong. We need to turn to God with a contrite heart and seek for His forgiveness (cf. Ps 51:17).

JOY IN CHRIST

"Nevertheless, God who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus." (2 Cor 7:6)

Helping a hurting friend is both a blessing and a responsibility for Christians. With God's grace, love, and healing power and through sincere intercessions, we can be ambassadors of comfort and hope. By sharing our loved ones' burdens and pain, we will experience joy when our Lord Jesus Christ leads them out of the valley of darkness. ★

True Jesus Church

Articles of Faith

Jesus the True God

Jesus Christ, the Word who became flesh, died on the cross for the redemption of sinners, resurrected on the third day and ascended to heaven. He is the only Savior of mankind, the Creator of the heavens and earth, and the only true God.

Holy Bible

The Holy Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, is inspired by God, the only scriptural truth, and the standard for Christian living.

Church

The True Jesus Church, established by our Lord Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit during the time of the "latter rain," is the restored true church of the apostolic time.

Baptism

Water baptism is the sacrament for the remission of sins for regeneration. The baptism must take place in natural living water, such as the river, sea, or spring. The Baptist, who already has had received baptism of water and the Holy Spirit, conducts the baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the person receiving the baptism must be completely immersed in water with head bowed and face downward.

Holy Spirit

Receiving the Holy Spirit, evidenced by speaking in tongues, is the guarantee of our inheritance of the kingdom of heaven.

Footwashing

The sacrament of footwashing enables one to have a part with the Lord Jesus. It also serves as a constant reminder that one should have love, holiness, humility, forgiveness, and service. Every person who has received water baptism must have his/her feet washed in the name of Jesus Christ. Mutual footwashing may be practiced whenever is appropriate.

Holy Communion

The Holy Communion is the sacrament to commemorate the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. It enables us to partake of the flesh and blood of our Lord and to be in communion with Him so that we can have eternal life and be raised on the Last Day. This sacrament shall be held as often as possible. Only one unleavened bread and grape juice shall be used.

Sabbath Day

The Sabbath day, the seventh day of the week (Saturday), is a holy day, blessed and sanctified by God. It is to be observed under the Lord's grace for the commemoration of God's creation and salvation and with the hope of eternal rest in the life to come.

Salvation

Salvation is given by the grace of God through faith. Believers must rely on the Holy Spirit to pursue holiness, to honor God, and to love humanity.

Last Day

The Lord's Second Coming will take place on the last day when He descends from heaven to judge the world: the righteous will receive eternal life, while the wicked will be eternally condemned.

TRUE JESUS CHURCH CONTACT INFORMATION

For additional information on the True Jesus Church, contact us or visit us on our website. We look forward to hearing from you!

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