

MANNA

ISSUE 72

Love—the Bond of Perfection

**Love Binds Us Together in Perfect Harmony •
5-in-1 Offering • Virtues of Counselors (Part 1)**

“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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Love—the Bond of Perfection

Editorial

by T. Chen

Strong families. What comes to your mind when you think of strong families?

To me, a strong family is one that lives together in harmony, one in which the members support and care for each other, one that works and plays together, and one that pulls through every situation together. Simply put, a family where there is love. I think, to most of us, this is the ideal family.

If we take a look at reality, however, we often find more strife and indifference than harmony and love in today's homes. Some families may quarrel regularly, while others may happily stick to each other in times of smooth-sailing but are scattered when the storms of life rise up. In fact, human love can be very strong, but it can also be short-lived. Our natural human inclination to focus on ourselves often causes misunderstandings and fights, and when it comes to making sacrifices, our first reaction usually is to run away. In other words, we may be capable of loving others, but deep down, we love ourselves more. That is why our love for others cannot endure.

The church is the body and household of Christ. It is our spiritual family. The bond between the individual members of this household is by the blood of Jesus Christ, through which He redeemed us from sin and made us children of God. But this is only the foundation; what builds up this spiritual family is Jesus' love (Eph 4:15b–16)—the only everlasting love. Hence, the body of Christ should be filled with God's love.

The Lord Jesus came to the world as a humble carpenter's son and led a life of hardship, without even

a place to lay his head (Mt 9:20). His short life on earth ended with His death on the cross—a testimony of His selfless sacrifice, where He had fully emptied Himself of His own will for our sakes. He did all this because He loves us.

Jesus' deep love for us should compel us to love Him in return. If we say we love Him, we must also love our brethren, because they are part of His body (1 Jn 4:7–11, 20–21; Rom 12:5; Gal 6:10). Hence, the writers of this issue's theme articles remind us to follow Christ's footsteps to turn our focus away from ourselves. We must empty ourselves, look towards others, constantly renew our minds, and ask God to fill us with His love. Regularly savor the word of God. Let His word speak to you. Be prayerful and submissive. Let the Holy Spirit guide and inspire you. Only then will we be able to see the needs of others and realize that they are just as human and weak as we are. With this realization, we will be willing to bear one another's weaknesses and forgive one another just as Christ forgave us. We will take the initiative to show care and concern for one another. His love will motivate us to do all these willingly, proactively, and sincerely. In this way, we will not only promote peace and unity at home, school, work, and at church, we will also build up the body of Christ. Ultimately, this body will grow into the full stature of Christ, perfect and mature in God's eyes, and we will become living testimonies of God's love—the only love that is able to bind us together in perfect harmony.

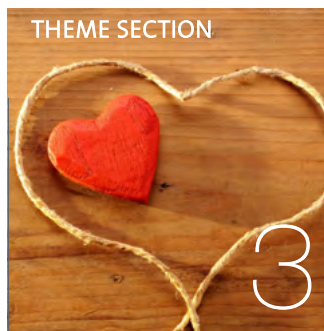
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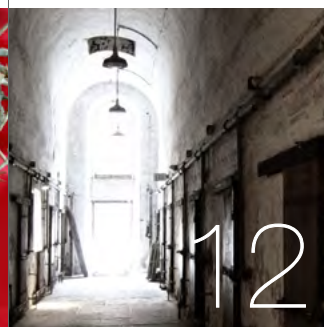


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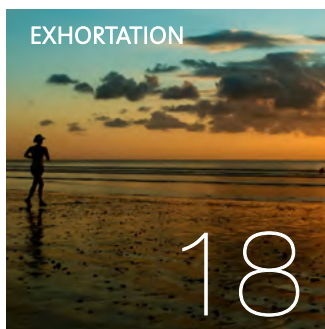
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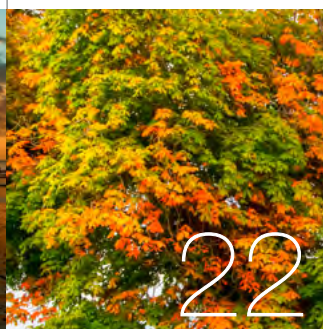


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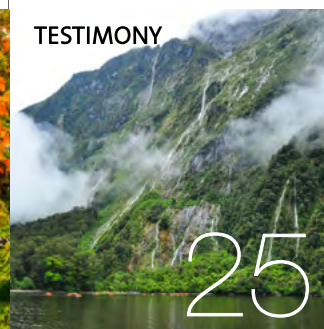


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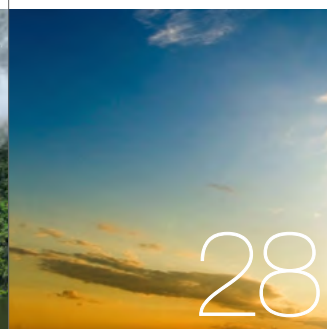


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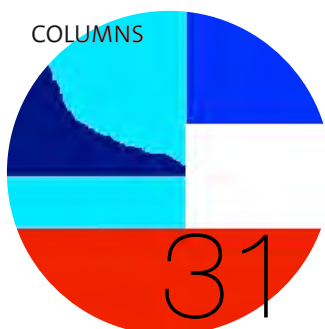


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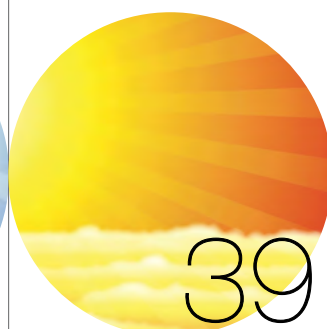
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Love—the Bond of Perfection



The Bond of Perfection

Vincent Yeung—Cambridge, U.K.

We live in a divided and fragmented society where reconciliation and unity are deemed impossible. This division manifests itself in different forms, ranging from benign self-isolation and simmering discontent to open conflicts. The sporadic flare-ups between Israelis and Palestinians, border skirmishes between North and South Koreans, ethnic violence between Han Chinese and minority Uyghurs in Western China are manifestations of such divisions. The dividing line is between religions, political ideals, and races. The situation is also fanned by the culture of adversarial politics where leaders of society play one group against another, drawing on social status, criticizing higher earners out of envy. At the opposite spectrum, politicians try to inculcate the idea of workers and shirkers, the latter being labeled as “undeserving poor,” and their impoverished conditions of existence presented as the result of their choice. Are these observations just a modern phenomenon, or are these universal shortcomings of human nature?

Apostle Paul exhorted the believers in Colossi to put on the new man¹ after they had been raised with Christ.² He defined this new man as one who does not differentiate between Greeks and Jews, circumcised and uncircumcised, foreigners and Scythians, slaves and freemen.³ The old man is plagued by demarcations of history, race, ideology, lifestyle, nationhood, and status. Believers are encouraged to put away this old man to make room for new characteristics.⁴

DIVIDING HUMAN NATURE

It is our nature to like and affiliate with those with whom we share the same background, culture, occupation, and status. Such unity enables us to exchange thoughts and ideas. Differences in race, ideology, way of life, nationhood, and status appear to us as formidable barriers. We find it difficult to invest time and effort to understand divergent ideas and viewpoints. Our instinctive response is to remain in our comfort zone, never venturing into unfamiliar territory, fearing rejection or frustration. In the same vein, we may even consider our ideas and way of life to be superior to those who happen to be different because our experience tells us that this is the right way to conduct our life.

The apostles could not break free from their traditional thinking, which prevented them from leaving Jerusalem to preach the gospel to all nations.⁵ Only with divine intervention⁶ and submission to God’s will⁷ did Jesus’ great commission eventually come to fruition. We should be mindful that our subjective mode of thinking does not suppress or supplant God’s perspective.

WE ARE IN THE RIGHT

Many examples in the Bible illustrate human propensity to seek justice and claim what is rightfully theirs. The parable of the unforgiving servant tells us of a servant who failed to forgive his fellow servant’s debt, even though his master had forgiven his own.⁸ A man asked Jesus to help him gain a fair share of his father’s inheritance.⁹

Corinthian believers resorted to civil court to adjudicate their grievances.¹⁰ The Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were overlooked in the daily serving;¹¹ a grievance aggravated by the thought that these ladies were victimized or ignored because of their identity.

The sense of injustice in material matters pales when the same mentality is applied in the spiritual realm. The hired men in the parable of the workers in the vineyard complained because they could not accept that the latecomers, who had worked less hours, received the same reward as them.¹² The elder brother in the parable of the prodigal son complained because he believed that his younger sibling, the prodigal son, was unworthy to receive his father's forgiveness and love. His bitterness was augmented by his belief that his father had failed to acknowledge and remember his loyal service.¹³

WE DESPISE THE WEAK AND JUDGE THE NON-CONFORM

It is also human nature to envy those who are better than us.¹⁴ Believing we are different¹⁵ and better, we fight for supremacy and recognition¹⁶ and we look down on those weaker than us¹⁷ or whom we perceive as unfitting.¹⁸ Such behavior could only result in envy, strife, and division in the church. The book of Romans recorded a row between two groups in the church. One group saw it fit to eat meat, while the other group only ate vegetables.¹⁹ The differences in their ways of life resulted in these two groups despising and judging each other.

The ungodly nature of human behavior is a potent dividing force within family, community, and society. The saints were conscious that such behavior persisted within the church community and therefore regularly reminded believers to put off this old man and assume the wholesome nature of Christ.

WHAT BIND THE DIVERSE GROUPS TOGETHER?

The concept of one body permeates

throughout the Bible.²⁰ A body consists of many parts and each part has its own function and unique characteristics.²¹ The differences between the components do not result in rejection or antagonism against each other. Instead, each part compliments and supports each other to ensure the whole body functions effectively.²²

The dividing nature of human behavior needs to be counteracted by God's love in order to uphold the body of Christ. The new man depicted in Apostle Paul's exhortation is not by name alone; it is characterized by mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, forbearance, forgiveness, and longsuffering.²³ These characteristics are the manifestation of love,²⁴ which diametrically oppose the divisive human nature denoted in previous examples.

Because love quietly covers all things and thinks no evil, love can neutralize adverse reactions that may arise when we are offended or neglected. As our perception is determined by our own thinking, a seemingly offensive statement could be overlooked completely, whereas an innocuous statement could be interpreted as spiteful, malicious, and provocative.

King Saul was furious when he heard women praising him and David, singing: "Saul has slain his thousands and David his ten thousands."²⁵ He did not take it as a compliment; instead, he became angry with David. The Bible describes this as "evil in his eye,"²⁶ which sparked off a series of destructive events. Had Saul interpreted the statement as praising God's greatness and mercy, the calamity that befell him and the sufferings of many could have been avoided.

If we harbor no evil thoughts, then we would not assume people are

intentionally targeting us. It is not uncommon for believers to complain that the sermonizers are targeting them; yet instead of judging the sermonizers' intentions, we should ask ourselves whether we have kept God's word. When we are offended, we should retreat rather than retaliate. God has forgiven us; likewise, we should forgive others.

The virtues of patience, kindness, hope, and endurance enable us to maintain quietude and inner tranquility when faced with continual challenges and mistreatments. When confronted by the Philistines²⁷ on several occasions, Isaac did not fight for his right. Instead he retreated, and God blessed him. He was in a "broad place" because he made room for himself.²⁸ Compassion, brotherly love, and tenderheartedness²⁹ are the obverse of envy, pride, and self-seeking; such virtues restrain us from provoking others,³⁰ repaying evil for evil or reviling for reviling.³¹ All these wonderful characteristics of love help us to overcome evil³² and bind us together in unity.³³

BE PERFECT

The oneness of God, our faith, one Spirit, one hope, and one calling succinctly denote the commonality of all believers. We are united, yet different, diverse, and gifted in various ways for the betterment of Christ's ministry.³⁴ Perfection only comes when we are united in thought, faith, and knowledge of Christ and when we assume the full stature of Christ.³⁵ We can only put on this new man by putting off the old one.³⁶ As we are expected to assume Christ's stature when we are in Christ, we should move from "Christ light" to Christlike.

The stature of Christ is expressed in His self-emptying³⁷ and self-sacrifice. He came not to be served but to

The dividing nature of human behavior needs to be counteracted by God's love in order to uphold the body of Christ.

Paul invites everyone to be touched and compelled by the love of Christ, to live a life for Christ, and to become a new creation. This new mode of existence entails God's love and is self-giving. The self-seeking mode of egocentric existence should give way to unconditional love.

serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.³⁸ His love does not depend on who we are,³⁹ what we are,⁴⁰ and where we are. This is unlike the reciprocal love that man expects.⁴¹ God's unconditional love also does not depend on how likeable we are.⁴²

Paul invites everyone to be touched and compelled by the love of Christ,⁴³ to live a life for Christ, and to become a new creation.⁴⁴ This new mode of existence entails God's love and is self-giving. The self-seeking mode of egocentric existence should give way to unconditional love. Only when we are truly Christlike, are we deemed to be perfect.⁴⁵

Attaining perfection is a process rather than an instant transformation. We learn to be perfect by self-giving instead of self-seeking. We learn to serve with the gifts God has given us, and we learn to love by being more tolerant of others⁴⁶ and by removing the conditions under which we could love.⁴⁷ If everyone in the community of faith assumes the love of Christ, we will have peace.⁴⁸ No longer will there be any situation or provocation that divides us, for we are bounded by God's love.

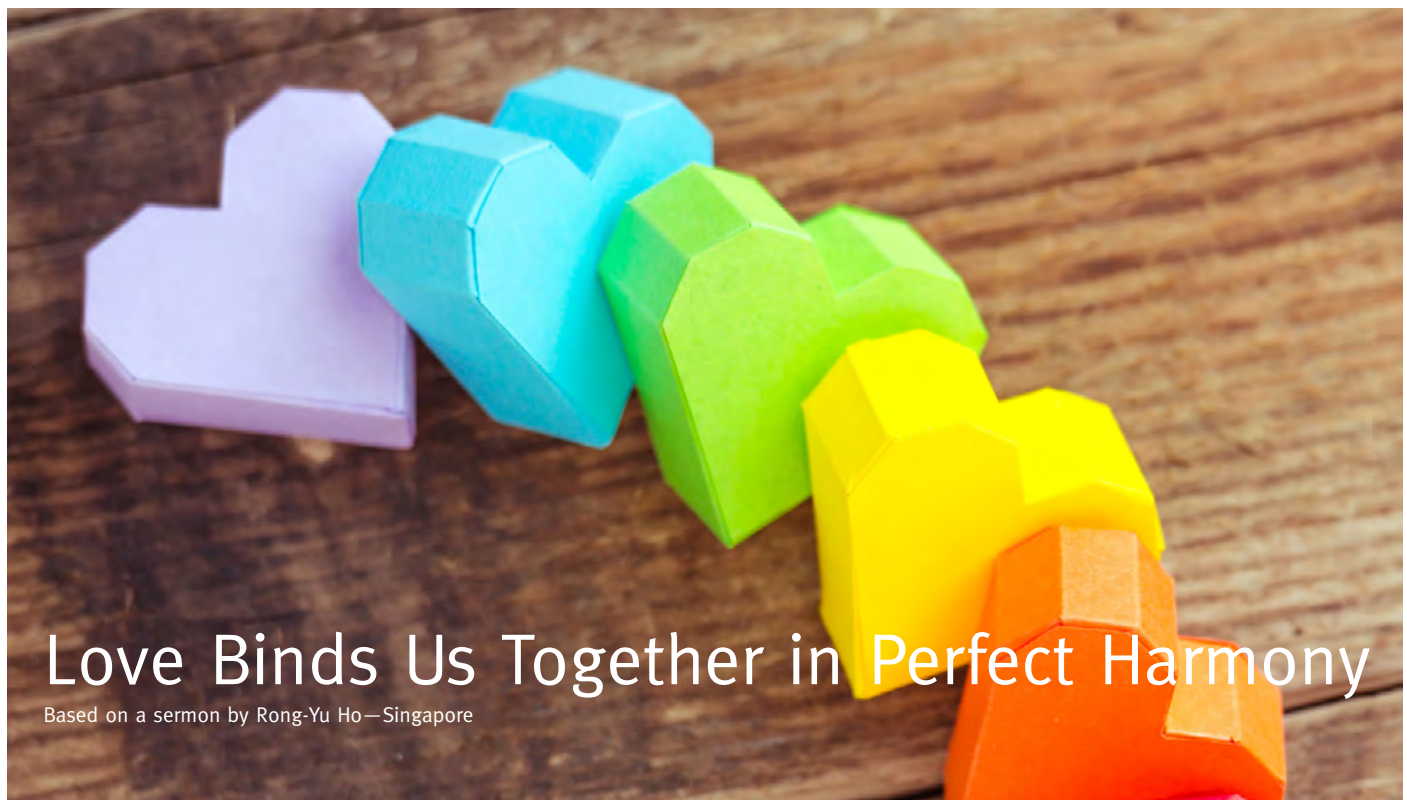
Christ has once and for all united the Jews and Gentiles by breaking down the middle wall of separation, abolishing the enmity, and creating in Himself one new man from the two.⁴⁹ This new man, a new creation, assumes the nature of Christ. We have freely received His grace through the redemption that is "in Christ" Jesus.⁵⁰ Being "in Christ" means we have lost our identity,⁵¹ and the "I" no longer exists, but Christ lives in us.⁵² By the free gift of God's grace, we are brought into His family, and we have peace and satisfaction in Him. His grace also enables us to live for others rather than for what others can give to us. Jesus' commandment to abide

in His word and His love unites us in Him;⁵³ this new mode of thinking and living binds us together.⁵⁴ Therefore, when we host a dinner, let us invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind, and we will be blessed.⁵⁵

The body of Christ comprises many parts that are jointed (or knit⁵⁶) together and "grows as God nourishes it."⁵⁷ The love of Jesus and our love towards Him and our fellow members knit us together.⁵⁸ This bond is not by blood, race, interest, and locale, but by the perfect love of God, which causes us to coalesce and be joined together. Hence, it is vital that we empty ourselves to truly breakdown the barriers that separate us. Only then can this bond of love be perfect. ★

Footnotes:

- 1 Col 3:10
- 2 Col 3:1
- 3 Col 3:11
- 4 Col 3:10
- 5 Mt 28:19; Act 1:8
- 6 Act 10:11-12; 10:47
- 7 Act 11:18
- 8 Mt 18:28-30
- 9 Lk 12:18
- 10 1 Cor 6:1-8
- 11 Act 6:1
- 12 Mt 20:11
- 13 Lk 15:29-30
- 14 Act 13:45
- 15 1 Pet 5:5-6
- 16 Mk 9:34
- 17 Jas 2:3-4
- 18 1 Cor 12:21-25
- 19 Rom 14:1-3
- 20 Rom 12:1, 5; 1 Cor 10:17, 12:12-13, 20; Eph 2:16, 4:4; Col 3:15
- 21 1 Cor 12:21-24
- 22 Rom 12:4-8
- 23 Col 3:12-13
- 24 Col 3:14
- 25 1 Sam 18:7
- 26 MKJV, 1 Sam 18:8
- 27 Gen 26:14, 15, 20, 21
- 28 Gen 26:22; the well's name "Rehoboth" literally means "broad place."
- 29 1 Pet 3:8
- 30 1 Cor 13:4-7
- 31 1 Pet 3:9
- 32 Rom 12:21
- 33 Col 3:14
- 34 Eph 4:10-12
- 35 Eph 4:13; cf. Phil 2:2,5
- 36 Col 3:9-10; Eph 4:22-24
- 37 Phil 2:7
- 38 Mk 10:45
- 39 Mt 9:36
- 40 Mt 5:45
- 41 Jn 5:44; Mt 5:46,48
- 42 Rom 5:8
- 43 2 Cor 5:13-14
- 44 2 Cor 5:17
- 45 Mt 5:48
- 46 1 Pet 4:8; Eph 4:2
- 47 1 Pet 4:9
- 48 Eph 4:3
- 49 Eph 2:14-15
- 50 Rom 3:24
- 51 Gal 3:28, 6:15
- 52 Gal 2:20
- 53 Jn 15:7,10
- 54 Jn 13:34
- 55 Lk 14:13-14; cf. 1 Pet 3:9
- 56 Greek for "knit": συμβιβάζω [symbibazō]
Strong's G4822: I. to cause to coalesce, to join together; put together
A. to unite or knit together: in affection
- 57 NLT, Col 2:19
- 58 Col 2:2



Love Binds Us Together in Perfect Harmony

Based on a sermon by Rong-Yu Ho—Singapore

Paul wrote his Epistle to the Colossians to refute the diverse heresies that had crept into the young church of Colossae. A key theme of this epistle is thus the sharp distinction between the supremacy of Christ (cf. Col 1:15–20) and the futility of human philosophies and of self-imposed religious rituals (cf. Col 2:16–20). In Colossians 3–4, the apostle sets out how we can live a more meaningful and sublime life.

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.

But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.

And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

(Col 3:12-17)

According to Paul, we—the holy and beloved chosen people of God—must clothe ourselves with perfection and the willingness to forgive others. As the one body of Christ, we ought to treat each other as part of the same family. This can only be achieved through love for each other (Jn 13:34–35). Christian love should not merely be an ideal captured in beautiful but ultimately empty prose. Instead, we must realize and demonstrate love in everyday life in emulation of Jesus Christ; we must strive to be a disciple of love.

What does it take to have Christ's perfect love?

GIRD OURSELVES WITH LOVE

First of all, we need to have the correct mindset. Paul tells us that God has specially chosen us to be His holy and beloved people. Though we were unworthy, God has approved us (cf. 1 Thess 2). Henceforth, we ought to live up to God's expectations of

us, which is to be different from the world. Colossians 3:12–13 lists ten different virtues that would make us different from the world. Paul encourages us to “put on” these virtues as if we were putting on clothes. Originally, these clothes did not belong to us, but now that we have put them on, they have become ours.

A critical part of our new garments is love, the bond of perfection. Traditionally, the Jews wear long robes with belts. Without the latter, the loose-fitting garments may make the wearer look unkempt. Analogously, we have to clothe ourselves with virtue and gird our waists with the belt of love. Girded thus, we have strength to walk in God's word and work for Him.

However, when we practice love, we should “do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men” (Col 3:23). The purpose of our good deeds and virtues is to please the Lord, rather than to garner men's praise. Things done willingly are sincere and proactive demonstrations of love. Therefore, the starting point of perfect love must be the right attitude of love—we are determined to love willingly because God first loved us,

and He wants us to love others; we serve God and help man willingly because this is the conduct that will earn us God's approval and praise.

FORGIVE ONE ANOTHER

Just As Christ Forgave Us

... bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. (Col 3:13)

Second, love entails mutual forgiveness. It may be relatively easy to overlook and forgive a minor hurt, but as Christians, the bar is set even higher for us. Just as the Lord has forgiven us, we should forgive each other willingly and wholeheartedly. The word "complaint" (Greek: μομφήν [mompḗn]) occurs in no other part of the Bible except for Colossians 3:13. It refers to a quarrel or an incident that has caused much discontentment or grumbling. Such conflicts among men are often the result of misunderstanding or a lack of mutual understanding.

Regardless of the reasons for our conflicts, we should always strive to bear with one another and forgive others if they have hurt us. We need to remember how often God has already forgiven us, and how He has taught His disciples to forgive others seventy times seven. It does not mean that we literally keep count of the number of times we have shown forgiveness. Instead, this number symbolizes complete forgiveness where we neither harbor a grudge against those who have offended us nor seek revenge. On the cross, Jesus epitomized such complete and unconditional forgiveness, praying for those who had crucified Him, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Lk 23:34).

Conflicts or disputes are inevitable in any family, including the large family in Christ, the church. The closeness within the family may mean that we are even more vulnerable to hurt in the same way that our teeth occasionally and accidentally bite

our lips or tongue. In addition, when wounds are inflicted by the people closest to us, they take even longer to heal, causing us much discomfort. But endure we must, or else the family will be ripped apart. Endurance does not mean grudging tolerance, where we do not actively seek revenge but cannot bring ourselves to be on speaking terms with those who have offended us. True forgiveness is a sincere bearing with our brothers and sisters in the Lord with the love of Christ.

Among the most difficult problems to solve within the church are disagreements among the believers. Misunderstandings or mutual complaints arise because everyone thinks that he or she is right. And when everyone clings stubbornly to their stand, problems will never be solved. Only unconditional love and forgiveness such as that shown by Jesus will heal existing wounds, removing the threat to the harmony within the church. Therefore, forgiveness is a very important expression of love and a prerequisite for church unity.

Let God Be Our Umpire

But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. (Col 3:14–15)

The peace of God refers to the unity that we have in the Lord. With such unity, there is both peace with men as well peace with God. In order to enjoy such peace, we must have Christ as our Lord.

Apostle Paul urges believers to allow the peace of God to rule in their hearts. The verb "rule" (Greek:

βραβεύετω [brabeuetō]) means "to umpire." In competitive sports, the umpire's role is to ensure that the players follow the rules. For some sports, the umpire may even have to decide which competitors to award points to. Not surprisingly, some competitors blame their loss on biased umpiring. So there is often tremendous pressure on the umpire. On the other hand, it is understandable why the competitors are so particular about umpiring standards. Very often, the difference of one point can determine whether someone will receive the gold or the silver medal.

Paul tells us that we need to have Christ as our umpire and allow Him to rule over us. We need to have no qualms about this umpire, for He is just, omniscient, and ever-present. Whether we meet with complaints, difficulties, or setbacks, we can and should ask the Lord to arbitrate for us. However, we must also be ready to accept the Lord's judgment, for His decisions are always right (Deut 32:4).

As human beings, we are wont to think we are always right (Prov 16:2; 21:2). However, when we are wrong, we must accept the ruling of the Divine Umpire. This is the only way to obtain peace between God and man as well as unity within the church. In worldly tournaments, we occasionally see players who refuse to accept the umpires' call, losing their temper on court or in the field. Some stomp off angrily, others verbally abuse or even physically assault the umpires. When such things happen, the entire game or competition will be marred, and even the results may be compromised. Similarly, no true believer who loves the household of God would want to see his brethren

We must thank God for all the setbacks and conflicts in our lives. It is only when we meet with adversity that we realize how difficult it is to practice the teachings in the Bible. As we learn to be more thankful, we will become more humble, forbearing, and loving towards others. Therefore, a heart of thanksgiving also helps us to increase in love.

seeking arbitration from secular authorities against each other (cf. 1 Cor 6:1–7). Therefore, in the church, instead of insisting that we are right, we need to ask God to be our Lord and umpire. Only in this way will God's peace come into our lives, for He is the only righteous judge.

GIVE THANKS TO GOD

Be thankful. (Col 3:15)

The third aspect of perfect love is thanksgiving. In His love, God has given us an abundance of spiritual and material blessings. We ought to be perpetually filled with gratitude toward Him (cf. Ps 118, 136; 1 Thess 5:16–18). However, without love, we will not feel grateful to God. Instead, we will only see the adversities that befall us and constantly grumble about our poor lot in life.

In order to become a more thankful person, we need to put down all our burdens, lay aside murmuring and unhappiness, and submit to the Lord. Once we have put aside these encumbrances, we will realize that the Lord is actually training us through these adversities; strengthening our character and faith, making us more thankful people. Once we have learned how to be thankful to God, our hearts will change. Instead of focusing myopically on our suffering and lamenting our situation in self-pity, we will be able to perceive the Lord's great mercy upon us and acknowledge that all things, whether good or bad, come from Him (Job 1:21).

Remain Humble

For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? (1 Cor 4:7)

The believers at Corinth had a variety of talents. Many of them were well-educated and enjoyed a certain status in society. However, they could not clearly see that they

When God's word dwells in us, it will touch and motivate us to practice love as well as to abound in works of love, even when the world does not reciprocate with love.

had received all these things from God. Instead, their God-given gifts became a source of comparison, dispute, and eventually division in the church. Therefore, Apostle Paul encouraged the Corinthians to learn from him and Apollos "not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other" (1 Cor 4:6).

When man gains wisdom or status, his perspective often changes. He may compare himself with others or even start despising those with less knowledge, wealth, or position. He may forget that his achievements are the result of the Lord's blessings and not entirely his own effort. He may believe more in himself than in Jesus. Pride and self-righteousness grow in his heart, and these can easily destroy the church's unity and fellowship.

Therefore, Paul reminds us to have a heart of thanksgiving. We must learn how to be thankful to the Lord for all His blessings, including the talents that we have been given to serve Him. We must also thank God for all the setbacks and conflicts in our lives. It is only when we meet with adversity that we realize how difficult it is to practice the teachings in the Bible. As we learn to be more thankful, we will become more humble, forbearing, and loving towards others. Therefore, a heart of thanksgiving also helps us to increase in love.

LET GOD'S WORD DWELL IN YOU

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly (Col 3:16)

Last but not least, we can only grow in true love for God and man if we allow God's word to dwell in us. We must not have a sojourner attitude towards the word of God—cursorily "visiting" the word of God once or

twice a week in church. Instead, we should constantly study God's word and allow it to fill our hearts. This has become even more pressing in the selfish world we live in today; only the truth can help us to live a life of love. When God's word dwells in us, it will touch and motivate us to practice love as well as to abound in works of love, even when the world does not reciprocate with love.

Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father. (Col 3:17)

Since we rely on the name of the Lord, we are in actual fact representing the Lord Jesus. Hence, all our words and actions must bring glory to the Lord instead of shaming Him. Once others can see Jesus in our conduct and our love, Christ and His word truly live in us.

PERFECTING LOVE, PERFECT UNITY

Love can overcome all hurt and prejudice. In our church life, we can practice love by forgiving others just as Christ forgave us, allowing Christ to be our umpire, and giving thanks to God. Doing these allows us to live in peace and harmony with our brothers and sisters. In addition, God's word must be planted deep in our hearts so that we can practice His love in our daily lives and reflect the image of Christ. Since we have been chosen, we must strive together to build up the body of the Lord, making it one through the perfect bond of love. ★



5-in-1 Offering

Based on a sermon by Peter Shee—Singapore

Almost every religion on earth, ancient and modern, includes making sacrifices to gods for favors. Today, sacrifices, or offerings, are usually made to gain wealth, good health, or a thriving business.

However, the biblical concept of offering sacrifices is very different from that of other religions. According to the Bible, the first sacrifice was not offered by man to God but was made by God for the good of man. After Adam and Eve had sinned against God, they felt the need to cover themselves because they realized they were naked. To take away their guilt, God sacrificed an innocent animal and used its skin to cover them. This is the beauty and key difference between the biblical concept of sacrifice and man's sacrifice to gods: God made the first sacrifice, and He did it for the good of man.

By studying God's Old Testament instructions on the five offerings in the Book of Leviticus, we will understand the richness of God's grace for us, what He desires for us, and how the full benefits of salvation are achieved for us in the one single sacrifice God Himself would make

thousands of years later. Each of the five offerings point to a different aspect of the greatest sacrifice of all: Jesus' death for our sins.

1. THE BURNT OFFERING: JESUS' TOTAL SACRIFICE

Leviticus chapter 1 explains that the ritual emphasis of the burnt sacrifice is on the body of the animal; it highlights the totality of the sacrifice. The animal must be skinned and cut into pieces and the entire body needs to be burned.¹

As God, Jesus existed even before He was born on earth. Therefore, in order to be sacrificed for the sake of our sins, Jesus had to take on a human body:

Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. (Heb 10:5)

Furthermore, Jesus "made Himself of no reputation,"² emptied Himself, and took on a physical body so that He could sacrifice Himself for us. As the "entire body" is sacrificed in the burnt offering, so is Jesus' entire body

[T]he biblical concept of offering sacrifices is very different from that of other religions. According to the Bible, the first sacrifice was not offered by man to God but was made by God for the good of man.

sacrificed, connoting the totality of His sacrifice for our lives.

Yet the burnt offering of the Old Testament could never remove sin. Instead, it was a “reminder of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.”³ Only through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ can sins be removed, for “Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God.”⁴ Whilst other religions sacrifice for selfish desire or material gain, God’s sacrifice is the greatest love for mankind: to lay down one’s life for another.

2. THE GRAIN OFFERING: JESUS’ SINLESS NATURE

The grain offering shows us the second aspect of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross: His sinless nature. Leviticus chapter 2 explains the grain offering: one takes some grain, grinds it into flour, bakes it into unleavened bread, and offers it as a sacrifice to God. The purity of this bread without leaven, represents holiness and gives off a sweet aroma to God. Biblically, leaven represents sin; moreover, “a little leaven leavens the whole lump,”⁵ meaning even the tiniest speck of sin will completely sully something pure and righteous. Because of this, the grain offering is the “most holy of the offerings to the Lord made by fire.”⁶

Like the grain offering, Jesus’ sacrifice was also a “sweet-smelling aroma”⁷ to God; He alone can cleanse our sins, because He was sinless. Hebrews 9:14 tells us Jesus “offered Himself without spot to God.” In order for Him to die a sinless death, He had to lead a sinless life. However, this doesn’t mean Jesus was never tempted.

The Bible records His first and final temptations after starting

His ministry, namely, the devil’s temptations in the wilderness and a desire to avoid death on the cross respectively. Now, after Jesus’ first recorded temptation, the Bible states, “[the devil] departed from Him until an opportune time.”⁸ This means that the devil sought opportunity and did, indeed, tempt Jesus in addition to the recorded temptations, “for we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.”⁹

We face temptations every day. Unfortunately, we tend to cave in because of our weaknesses. Jesus too had weaknesses as a human being. However, unlike us, He did not yield to them, even though the devil tempted Jesus as he does to us. Instead, Jesus overcame all temptations and maintained a pure and holy life.

When we see the grain offering and remember that it refers to the sinless death of Christ, we remember His sinless life. Having lived over thirty years in the flesh, imagine the amount of effort Jesus had to go through to overcome these temptations. Yet He did not sin once. Jesus loves us so much that He fought against temptation and sin for the sake of our weaknesses, so that we might overcome our sin and live.

3. THE PEACE OFFERING: JESUS RECONCILES US TO GOD

The peace offering, sometimes

known as the fellowship offering, signifies reconciliation with God. Leviticus chapter 3 explains that the priests “sprinkle the blood all around on the altar”¹⁰ and the sacrificed animal is not completely burnt. While the fat is burnt as food for God,¹¹ the flesh is eaten by man:¹² this represents fellowship between God and us. Additionally, the peace offering is offered voluntarily whenever one desires to give to God, make a vow, or to have fellowship with Him. This refers to the sweet and meaningful aspect of Jesus’ sacrifice.

For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. (Rom 5:10)

Being an “enemy” of God refers to our status whilst we are sinful and have no relationship with God. The reconciliation Paul refers to, through Jesus’ sacrifice, indicates not only forgiveness, but also a relationship between ourselves and God that is just like a relationship of love between father and child.

Without Christ, our spiritual status is as a Gentile:¹³ without God and without hope in the world. Without Christ’s loving sacrifice, we would not know God; we would be His enemy and face physical death and spiritual torment. But when Jesus reconciles us to God through His death on the cross, we are made holy, blameless, and above reproach in His sight. We no longer have to avoid God’s presence like Adam after he had sinned against God. We are no longer strangers to God but members of God’s household! Like the peace offering given the Israelites, today, Jesus gives us fellowship with God.

Jesus has signed our check of guilt over and above what we needed to pay. As for the change, Jesus says: keep it. He has not only forgiven our sins but has also given us everlasting life in heaven. ... The question is: how do we repay what Jesus has done for us?

4. THE SIN OFFERING: JESUS CLEANSSES OUR SINS

While the burnt offering highlights the body, the sin offering focuses on the blood of Jesus and its cleansing effect. Just as the blood of animals would cleanse the flesh, Jesus' blood cleanses "[our] conscience from dead works to serve the living God."¹⁴ Here, the writer of Hebrews explains the true effect of Jesus' blood: it will completely cleanse our sins and spiritually restore us to God.

Paul further explains that being under the control of sin is similar to being a slave to sin. In order to free us, Jesus "paid" for us with His blood. This is so precious a price, yet Jesus willingly laid down His life and shed His blood for our sakes. We should, therefore, remember His sacrifice and glorify God with our lives.

5. THE TRESPASS OFFERING: JESUS BORE OUR GUILT

Whilst the blood cleanses sins, according to Leviticus 5:1–5, the trespass offering focuses on one's guilt and shame. To bear guilt is to bear punishment, and the trespass offering reminds us that sin has its punishment. Jesus paid with His life so that we would not have to face the consequences of our guilt.

And he shall make restitution for the harm that he has done in regard to the holy thing, and shall add one-fifth to it and give it to the priest. So the priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the trespass offering, and it shall be forgiven him. (Lev 5:16)

This verse discusses the concept of restitution, or compensation. Our Lord Jesus Christ died for us, not only to cleanse our sins, but also to pay what we owe due to our sins a necessary part of reconciliation with God. Romans 6:23 tells us that the wages of sin is death: whoever sins must die. Yet we truly praise God, for Jesus, in His great love, took our place and paid that price on our behalf.

Paul understood this deeply and explained to the Colossian church:

And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

(Col 2:13–14)

We may be walking, living, and breathing, yet because of our sins and the guilt we carry, God sees us as dead. Today, we owe our spiritual life to Jesus. When He died on the cross, the requirement of compensation we owe died with Him. Some people misunderstand this and say that the law died with Jesus. However, this doesn't make sense, since God's laws direct our everyday lives. In reality, God nailed to death what we owe: according to the law, our death. When Jesus came, He did not abolish the law but fulfilled it. He saw what each of us owed and said, "I can pay it." He took our debt¹⁵ to the cross and nailed it to the cross, along with Himself.

We owe life that is finite, yet Jesus paid with His infinite life. If you owed someone a million dollars and were given a blank check, you would probably write a number exceeding a million dollars turning it into a lifelong annuity. Similarly, Jesus has signed our check of guilt over and above what we needed to pay. As for the change, Jesus says: keep it. He has not only forgiven our sins but has also given us everlasting life in heaven.

OFFERING A LIVING SACRIFICE

The five offerings of the Old Testament are fulfilled in Jesus' singular sacrifice of perfect love for us. The question is: how do we repay what Jesus has done for us? As mere mortals we cannot do very much in relation to Jesus' unconditional sacrifice; but we can strive to offer continual sacrifices of praise to glorify and honor His name with our words and deeds. Jesus gave His life for us. We should give our lives for Him:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

(Rom 12:1–2) ★

1 Lev 1:6,9

2 Phil 2:7

3 Heb 10:3–4

4 Eph 5:2

5 1 Cor 5:6–7

6 Lev 2:3,10

7 Eph 5:2

8 Luke 4:13

9 Heb 4:15

10 Lev 3:2,8,13

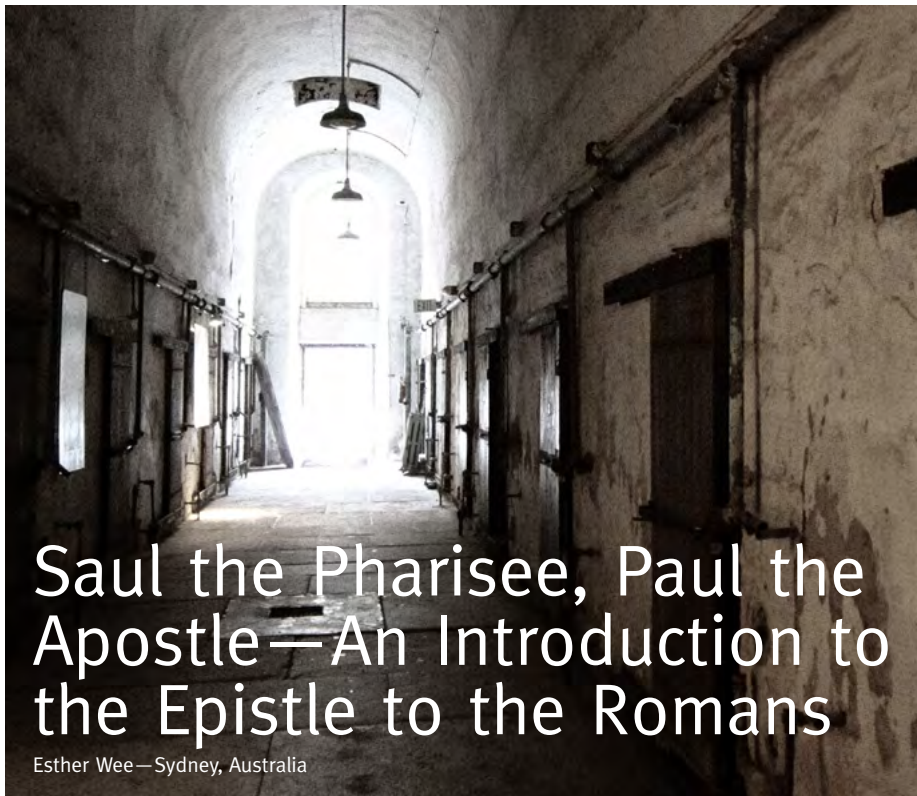
11 Lev 3:3–5, 9–11, 14–16

12 Lev 7:15–17

13 Eph 2:11–13

14 Heb 9:13–14

15 The "handwriting of requirements that was against us" in Col 2:14 uses the idea of cancellation of the certificate of debt to illustrate our release from guilt.



Saul the Pharisee, Paul the Apostle—An Introduction to the Epistle to the Romans

Esther Wee—Sydney, Australia

Verses and passages in the Epistle to the Romans are frequently cited as bases for doctrinal and theological positions. While necessary, such selective extraction does not do full justice to Paul's greatest and most sublime work. In this epistle, a breathtaking diversity of topics fit together neatly and perfectly within Paul's main thrust, much like how a diverse and changing landscape form the perfect backdrop through which the one mighty river flows. This article provides an introduction to the historical background of both the apostle and the city.

THE CENTRAL MESSAGE OF ROMANS

The Book of Romans comprises sixteen chapters covering topics both theological and pastoral. Despite explanatory excursus, the razor-sharp and disciplined mind of Paul, a former Pharisee trained in the Torah, maintains a firm grasp of the central message, even as he steers the reader along with the requisite flow of logic and argument. And it is a marvelous message indeed! The true God, the God of Israel, had been faithful to His covenantal promises to Israel through and in the work and person of Jesus

the Messiah; through His birth, life, death, and resurrection. Both the church in Rome and indeed the whole world would need to hear of the good news.

This covenantal faithfulness of God is still being unveiled to man, even till this day, because of Jesus' willing faithfulness and obedience. When the good news is met by a response of faith, the power and grace of God works unto the salvation of man, to the Jew first and then to the Greek (Rom 1:1–6, 16–17). The latter representing the Gentiles in the flesh, “being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise,” who are now made members of the reconstituted household of God (Eph 2:11–22). How great the mercy and wisdom of God! How significant a debt owed to the Jewish nation!

THE OCCASION OF THE EPISTLE

Paul probably wrote this epistle around AD 56–57 from Corinth, at the close of his third missionary journey during a three-month sojourn in Greece (Acts 20:2–3), and just before his return to Jerusalem, bringing with him relief and aid from the churches in Achaia and

Macedonia (Rom 15:25–26). At that moment of writing, Paul's host was Gaius (Rom 16:23), whom Paul had baptized in Corinth (1 Cor 1:14).

Paul had long intended to visit Rome and, prospectively, Spain (Rom 1:8–13; Acts 19:21; Rom 15:23–26, 28) but had been hindered (Rom 15:22). So when he learned that Phoebe, a “servant of the church” in Cenchrea¹ (Rom 16:1–2), was going to Rome on her own business and could thus personally deliver his epistle to the Roman church, Paul seized the opportunity to express his desire to visit the Roman brethren and to inform them of his plans.

Besides holding this divine office of the church, Phoebe was also described as “a patron” προστάτις [prostatis]² of Paul and others like him (Rom 16:2). In ancient Roman society, a Patronus, or benefactor, was a person from a certain social class who used his/her private wealth for public good; necessarily then, a man or woman of substance and honor. Phoebe was thus an ancient—though no less shining—example of one who used her wealth to do good deeds and to serve Christ (1 Tim 6:18); as was Gaius who played the generous host not only to Paul but also to the

whole church. These two are one of many exemplars to the modern Christian of how the unheralded acts of charity and hospitality are crucial support to workers in the field. In short, while not everyone can be a Paul, anyone could be a Phoebe or a Gaius.

HISTORICAL BACKDROP

How was the church established in Rome? Second century accounts tell of Peter coming to Rome to announce the Messiah to the sizeable Jewish community of Rome after his miraculous escape from prison (Acts 12). In AD 49, Emperor Claudius expelled all Jews from Rome “since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus” (Suetonius).³ And that was how Paul met Aquila and Priscilla, a Jewish couple from Rome who had gone to Corinth after their expulsion from Rome (Acts 18:2).

After the Claudian edict, the Roman church would have been left with non-Jewish Christians, god-fearers and former proselytes to Judaism who likely distanced themselves from all things Jewish in the context of the expulsion of Jews. However, when Nero reversed the decree in AD 54, the Jewish Christians who kept the Torah returned, likely, leading to internal tensions. This could have been a contributing factor, but not the sole reason, Paul undertook to write a tome such as the book of Romans.

Paul may also have intended to use Rome as a base for his evangelistic operations in the western Mediterranean (Rom 15:18–19, 23). However, conscious of the Jew-Gentile tensions in the Roman church, he strove to avert a repeat of the “Antioch incident” (Gal 2). He wanted to avoid any hint of Jewish

superiority but needed to dispel any notion that the boat of gentile Christianity could be free of Jewish moorings (Marcionism⁴ of the second century). To this end, Paul expounded on how the God of Israel was faithful to His covenant with Abraham and in so doing, showed His righteousness and fulfilled His promises to and, as well, through Israel. His central theme was a very Jewish explanation to the gentile world of a Jewish Messiah who was also the Savior of the gentile world. Paul takes pains to write of the Jewish roots of Christianity—the root supported the branches, not vice versa.

Therefore, to better understand this Pauline epistle and all of the New Testament writings, we must first understand something of Judaism in Paul’s time—known as the period of “Second Temple Judaism”—for this is the historical grid of all New Testament writings.

SECOND TEMPLE JUDAISM

All Second Temple Jews shared some fundamental beliefs and hopes.

First, the basic principle of Judaism—a striking contrast to the pervasive paganisms of the day—was their belief in the God of Israel, the one true God; the first monotheistic faith, a faith of high morals and ethics in keeping with an all holy God.

Second, Israel was the elect people with whom this one true God had entered into a solemn covenant. Israel was given the Law (Torah), which marked them out as the elect people. The Jews recognized that grace preceded covenant and Torah-keeping was the expected and faithful human response to the covenant. There is no evidence that Second Temple Judaism was a self-righteous legalistic scheme of salvation earned through the works

of the law. To impose this grid upon the Pauline epistles is to detract from a more accurate understanding of Paul. The apostle to the Gentiles was nonetheless Jewish.

Third, the ancient Jewish prophets spoke of God’s promises for the one future for Israel and the entire world, where God would act to redeem Israel, execute universal judgment, defeat Israel’s enemies, deliver the remnant faithful Israel from oppression, and, to right all wrongs, condemn the sinner and justify (vindicate) the righteous. The land of promise and the whole world would be renewed and restored, and the temple would be cleansed. This would be the new creation (Isa 32:14–20, 35:1–10, 41:17–20; Ezek 40–48). The kingdom of God would finally come on earth as it is in heaven. For those who believed in the resurrection, God would bodily raise the dead to live in the renewed Israel and renewed world—the age to come (Ha Olam Haba). Thus, history was discussed and spoken of in terms of two ages—“this age (Ha Olam Haze)” and “the age to come (Ha Olam Haba),” terms that Jesus and Paul clearly used within the Jewish sense (Mt 12:32, 13:40; Lk 20:34–35; Gal 1:4).⁵

The agreement on fundamental beliefs ended here. The bitter reality of Roman rule was everywhere seen and felt, making it painfully evident that the covenantal promises were not yet fulfilled. Judaism itself was far from a state of homogeneity! How to hasten the kingdom of God and the age to come and overthrow the Romans, the erstwhile archetype of God’s enemies? How to know who would be and not be justified and vindicated in the future? Why the delay in the coming of the kingdom of God? Opinions and interpretations of the law and the prophets were sufficiently diverse amongst the sects and groups as to make attainment of their hope—“the age to come”—appear impossible.

First, there was the Qumran community of the Dead Sea Scroll fame who practiced a radical separation from the rest of society.

Paul, a former Pharisee trained in the Torah, maintains a firm grasp of the central message ... The true God, the God of Israel, had been faithful to His covenantal promises to Israel through and in the work and person of Jesus the Messiah; through His birth, life, death, and resurrection. Both the church in Rome and indeed the whole world would need to hear of the good news.

They believed that their version of Torah interpretation and keeping would mark them out as “true Israel” and ensure future vindication.

Second, the Pharisees, whom the Qumran community identified as a dangerous rival group “who seek to smooth things (flatter),⁶” have been variously identified elsewhere with the “faithful ones” (Hasidim),⁷ the traditionalists who opposed Greek influence on the Hasmonean dynasty, the “wise” (hakamin)⁸ successors of Ezra the scribe who interpreted and expounded on the Torah, and those who adhered to strict rules of purity and kosher laws (haberim).⁹ In the reign of Herod the Great, the Pharisees bifurcated into two branches, the Shammaites (“the strictest rigorists”) and the Hillelites (“the more lenient”).¹⁰

Third, there were the Sadducees who were of priestly descent and the aristocratic circle. They constituted a politically powerful group. Famously, they disagreed with the Pharisees over the question of the resurrection and were more concerned with preserving present political power and privilege. Such people then, as now, are less concerned with revolution or resurrection.

The rest of the population was groaning under the double yoke of Roman tax and military ruthlessness. Brigandage was rife, and rebellion ever simmering under the surface of Pax Romana. Hatred of Rome and heightened expectations of God’s kingdom was a dangerously combustible mixture. Many messiahs declared their hand. The common people were glad to be just left alone to eke out a meager living and to keep the Torah the best they could.

Into this splintered, highly inflamed and inflammable world of Second Temple Judaism, our Lord was born and Paul wrote. We are not to imagine that that age was an age of uniform spiritual clarity. But as God shone His light into the world of darkness at that time, God shines His light into the world through His church today.

SAUL THE PHARISEE—ZEALOUS FOR GOD AND THE TORAH

To which of these Jewish sects did Paul belong? The apostle’s self-description of his religious and intellectual heritage was: “Concerning the law [Torah], a Pharisee” (Phil 3:5). Saul had been trained in and understood the Torah as a Pharisee, the precursor of rabbinical Judaism. His mind was soaked in Torah, his life permeated with it, and he possessed an overwhelming memory of it. His mode of logic and thought was Pharisaic and rabbinical.

He used to sit at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), the rabbi of the school of Hillel. This school opposed force of arms and revolution and would accept foreign rule provided they were left alone to study Torah. By the time Stephen was stoned, Saul was clearly under the sway of the school of Shammai, the other Pharisaic school whose interpretation of Torah was stringent and strict. For them, there could be no other king over the land given to Israel except the God of Israel Himself.

“Concerning zeal, persecuting the church” (Phil 3:6): This was no ordinary zeal, which twenty first century believers associate with servitude, prayer, or involvement in divine work. This “zeal” was that of Phinehas who had impaled a spear through the morally offensive couple (Num 25:11; Ps 106:30); of Elijah who defeated and destroyed all the false prophets (1 Kgs 19:14) and latterly, of Judah Maccabeus who waged armed resistance against the Greek Seleucids (I and II Maccabees). This was a revolutionary zeal that would take up arms, if necessary, to eliminate foreign domination and even renegade treacherous Jews (read Christians) in order to hasten the “age to come.” It was a potent mixture of religion and politics. As in those days, so it is now in the holy land. Faithful Jews were defined as those who kept the Torah (according to the respective sect’s interpretation); and only those who displayed such fidelity to the covenantal God would be justified on the day of the last

judgment. Paul thought he was of “true Israel,” and he was bent on eliminating all of God’s enemies and to hasten the age to come.

CONCLUSION

To perceive the worldview of Saul the persecutor of the church is to perceive through the prism of historical, religious, and cultural backdrop of Second Temple Judaism. This worldview, that of his former self and of his unbelieving fellow Jews, is what Paul describes as “a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge” (Rom 10:2). Proceeding to read the Epistle to the Romans against the grid of Second Temple Judaism and to see how Paul the apostle reinterprets and views afresh the same covenantal promises of the ancient Jewish Scriptures is both exciting and revealing. In addition, it turns out to form a snug fit with the Articles of Faith of the True Jesus Church, reassuring us of “a zeal according to knowledge!” ★

1 The eastern port city of Corinth.

2 Feminine form for the masculine προστάτης [prostates]; Latin: Patronus.

3 Suetonius; *The 12 Caesars*; Claudius 25:1–5.

4 Marcion of Sinope (2nd century AD), held to a dualistic notion of God. The God of the Old Testament was a wrathful and evil god. He rejected the entire Hebrew canon and those of the New Testament writings, which he thought favored the Jews. Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, (1982), 62–64.

5 Torah, Ne’ vim, Ketuvim and B’rit HaChad’Shah (NT), (The Bible Society in Israel, 1991).

6 J.C. VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today*, (Second Edition, 2010), 149–151.

7 Du Toit et al, *Guide to the New Testament, Vol II, The New Testament Milieu*, 12.4.1; Logos Bible Software 4.

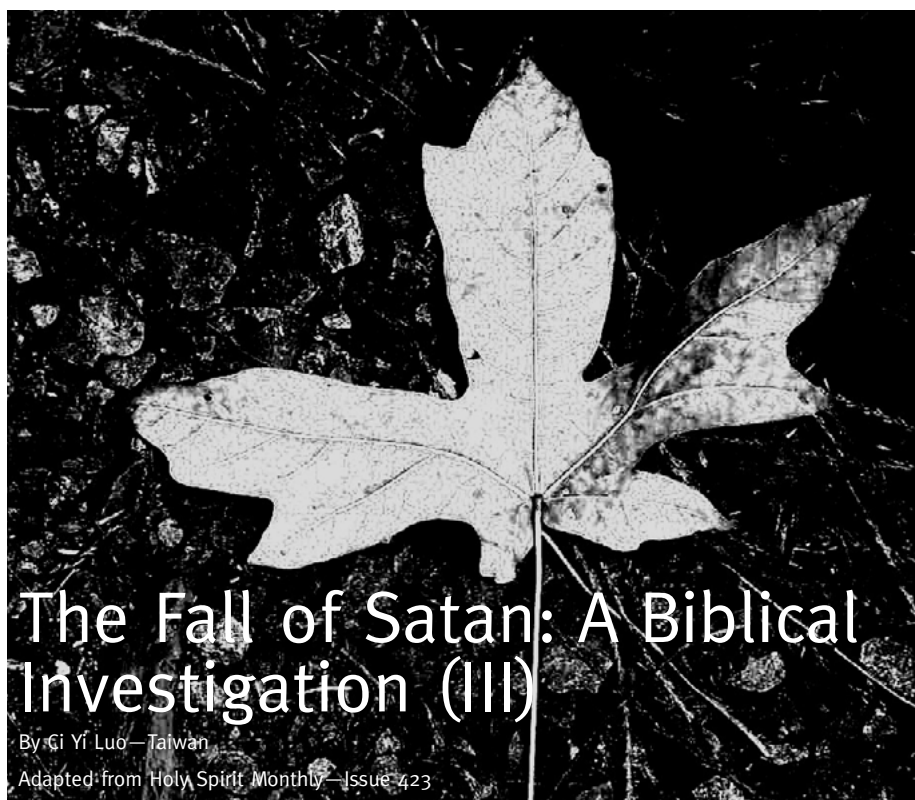
These *Hasidim* were the early pious Jews and are not to be confused with the Hasidic movement of the 18th century in eastern Europe.

8 The *Hakamin* were the professional wise men (scribes). Many of the Pharisees were scribes and vice versa.

9 The *Haberim* were practitioners of ritual purity who sought to transfer the holiness of the temple to the home. Therefore one must eat secular food as if one were a temple priest; R. Viladesau & M.S. Massa, *World Religions: A Sourcebook for Students of Christian Theology*, (1994), 192–193.

10 *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, 1184; Logos Bible Software 4.

Shammai had the reputation for being strict, literal, and rigid in his interpretation and application of the Torah, while Hillel was more liberal and humane in applying the Torah. Shammai was renowned for his hatred of Roman domination.



The Fall of Satan: A Biblical Investigation (II)

By Gi Yi Luo—Taiwan

Adapted from Holy Spirit Monthly—Issue 423

In part two of this series, we examined how Satan was originally a member of heaven, part of the principalities and powers within the spiritual world that were created by God and good, just as all of God's creation (Col 1:16). However, when this spiritual being became proud, he disobeyed God, did not maintain his assigned position, and failed to fulfill his duties and responsibilities. Henceforth, Satan became the fallen one among God's creation; he turned into the ruler of darkness and the believers' spiritual enemy.

AFTER THE FALL OF SATAN

After Satan's fall, he focused on attacking Adam, since Adam had been made in the image and likeness of God. Satan lied to confuse Eve in the Garden of Eden. When Jesus faced the Jews who sought to kill Him, He revealed the sin that Satan had committed from the beginning: "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He 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).

Ever since Adam committed sin, fell short of the glory of God, and was expelled from the Garden of Eden, sin entered the world through Adam, the one man. Death came through because of this sin and thus, death spread to all men.¹ Since then, except for God's people, the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.²

In the Epistle to the Romans, Apostle Paul explains that "God ... gave [man] up," not once but thrice, "to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, [and] to dishonor their bodies among themselves"³ because humans are stubborn and rebellious. This "giving up" of man reveals a world that truly belongs to the devil. Those who disobey God's purposes, obstruct God's will, subject themselves to man's will, set their minds on things of the flesh, and do not see the truth of God's will, all belong to Satan,⁴ the "ruler of this world."⁵ For those who are blind to the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, Satan has become "the god of this world" who prevents the light of the gospel to shine on them.⁶

His becoming a "god" of this world reveals that Satan did not have his own kingdom or power "in the beginning." Instead, after sin was committed "from the beginning,"⁷ Satan began to accumulate other fallen ones along the way, culminating

in the formation of "darkness"⁸ and the powers of darkness. As we observe the world today, it is indeed filled with every kind of wickedness, just as Paul reported: "... filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they (the ungodly) are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful" (Rom 1:29–31).

Although Satan walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour,⁹ he does not have absolute power because he is restricted by God Himself. Satan cannot simply devour anyone he wants to devour—rather he can only set his hand on those who can be devoured. For example, Satan wanted to attack Job without a valid reason, but he was aware that he could not do so without God's

approval. The Book of Job describes how Satan could see that God had “made a hedge around [Job], around his household, and around all that he [had] on every side” (Job 1:10). Satan could only wander outside this fence or wait for Job to cross the fence. Satan could not even take one step over the fence that God had erected.

Hence, Satan incited God to go against Job, to destroy Job without cause.¹⁰ For the first time ever, God delivered all that Job had into the hands of Satan, but with the clause that Satan should not harm Job.¹¹ Once Satan obtained this limited “permission” from God, he immediately retreated from the presence of God and began to wantonly destroy everything Job had with extreme vengeance and malice. Although this gives us a clear example of Satan’s cruelty, it also assures us of Satan’s limitations within God’s mighty framework.

Within the constraints of earthly evil, Satan is the father of all liars, the source of all lies, and the source of sin.¹² Those whose minds are occupied by the devil become a tool and representative of the devil.¹³ Furthermore, the authority that Satan wields over the world is not his own. Instead, Satan’s authority has come from evil being “delivered” to him. For instance, Paul named and “delivered” to Satan the blasphemers Hymenaeus and Alexander, who had rejected their consciences and whose faith had suffered shipwreck¹⁴—in other words, utter destruction.

From the facts discussed above, it is clear that Satan is a landfill of collected evil, lies, and corruption. Any promises he peddles are second-hand helpings of refuse that further confuse the people who have forsaken God.

Although Satan walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour, he does not have absolute power because he is restricted by God Himself.

THE MANY TITLES THAT DESCRIBE THE DEVIL

In the Bible, Satan has many names. Based on these titles, different aspects of Satan’s evil attributes are revealed.

NAME / TITLE	ATTRIBUTE BEING EMPHASIZED	BIBLICAL REFERENCE
Satan	Opposer, hinderer, hater	Zech 3:1; Mt 4:10; 1 Thess 2:18
Devil	Blasphemer, accuser, adversary	Mt 4:1; Eph 6:11; 1 Pet 5:8
The wicked one	A wicked base	Mt 13:19; Jn 17:15
Great red dragon	Vicious destroyer of created beings	Rev 12:3,7,9
Serpent of old	Deceiver at the Garden of Eden	Rev 12:9
Abaddon (<i>Hebrew</i>)	Destroyer	Rev 9:11
Apollyon (<i>Greek</i>)	Destroyer	Rev 9:11
Adversary	Roaming around to devour those believers who can be devoured	1 Pet 5:8
Beelzebub	King of the flies	Mt 12:24
Belial	Valueless	2 Cor 6:15
god of this age	Controlling global outlook in life	2 Cor 4:4
Ruler of this world	Controlling the evil world	Jn 12:31
Prince of the power of the air	Controlling the sons of disobedience	Eph 2:2
Enemy	Specialized in destroying the gospel of the kingdom of God	Mt 13:25
Tempter	Misleading mankind to commit sin and depart from God	Mt 4:3
Murderer	Leading mankind to eternal death and destruction	Jn 8:44
Liar	Misinterpreting truth; no truth	Jn 8:44
Accuser	Accusing God’s people in front of God Himself	Rev 12:10

THE LORD JESUS CLAIMED VICTORY OVER SATAN FOR OUR SAKE

The purpose of Jesus’ birth has been “to save His people from their sins;”¹⁵ only through Jesus can man be reconciled with God.¹⁶ He is the source of life and is life itself; He “[has] power to lay it down, and ... power to take it again.”¹⁷ The Lord Jesus fulfilled the salvation plan of God and met the righteous requirements needed to redeem us, sinners in the world.¹⁸ A person redeemed by Jesus’ precious blood¹⁹ will be delivered from the powers of darkness and enter the kingdom of God.²⁰

The key to Jesus’ victory lay in His resurrection: Jesus “has gone into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.” This description from 1 Peter 3:22 explains the meaning of His resurrection. In Eph 1:20–22, Paul also beautifully testified of this, saying “[God] worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church.” Jesus also declared: “Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out,”²¹ confirming His total victory over Satan.

After the downpour of the promised Holy Spirit at Pentecost, “the ruler of this world (the devil) was judged.”²² The spiritual body of Jesus’ church had

now been established, meaning that “the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places.”²³ Colossians 2:13–15 succinctly summarizes the essential element of Jesus’ victorious saving grace: “He has made (you) alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.”

It is important to understand and acknowledge that although Jesus’ precious blood has cleansed us from our sins and the Holy Spirit has confirmed our inheritance of the kingdom of heaven, we still “groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.”²⁴ We, who have been spiritually redeemed, still yearn for bodily resurrection, just as Jesus’ body was also resurrected. When that time comes, the enemies who dominate mankind will be totally destroyed;²⁵ Jesus’ work of salvation will be complete.

BELIEVERS CAN RELY ON THE LORD JESUS TO CLAIM VICTORY OVER SATAN

The infallible truth of the Lord Jesus’ complete victory over Satan is a guaranteed promise for all who rely on Him to triumph over Satan. In our journey of faith today and before we claim victory over Satan, we know that we have received numerous promises as well as witnesses that assure us of Jesus’ triumph. Luke also records the true promise from Jesus to His disciples and to all who believe in Him: “Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you” (Lk 10:19). In Romans 16:20, Paul too victoriously declares: “the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly.”

Claiming victory over Satan is not based on a believer’s courage or ability. Instead, we must completely rely on Jesus’ precious blood²⁶ by continuing in God’s true way and allowing the Holy Spirit to lead us.²⁷ Then, with the power from above, our spiritual cultivation, and determination,²⁸ putting on the full armor of God, obeying the Lord, and resisting the tempter’s snares, Satan will surely flee from us.²⁹ To be victorious, we must hold on, even at the risk of our own lives, and remain faithful to the end.³⁰

GOD’S APPOINTED TIME FOR SATAN’S END

According to the Revelation of Jesus Christ that Apostle John penned, Chapter 12 reveals that the archangel Michael will fight with the “dragon” (the devil) before the seven bowls of God’s wrath are poured out. The result will be: “nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer ... he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.” Satan will be defeated and will no longer be able to accuse believers in front of God.³¹

The Book of Revelation assures us that God has prepared Satan’s end a long time ago: “The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”³²

CONCLUSION

The Bible teaches us that God is the “sovereign one” who has created all things; Jesus is the Word who became flesh, the center of the gospel’s message for mankind and the main axis of God’s salvation. Satan, the “spiritual downfall” amongst God’s whole creation, is actually not that important. What is important is to realize that God takes center stage in the beginning, right to the end. He made the heavens and the earth; He is the one and only true God; He holds sole authority; He is the only self-existing one who created light and darkness, peace and calamity.³³

“In the beginning,” God created all things in the spiritual and the material world. “The principality and power” of the spiritual world, by virtue of its conceited nature, went from being innocent and belonging to God to “fallen.” Thereafter, the “fallen,” or Satan, tempted Adam with lies and deceit, causing Adam to sin against God. Satan became the ruler and holder of the world of darkness. Yet because of love, the Word became flesh, and through His own blood, that Word, Jesus, broke the bondage of death for mankind. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus became the model for mankind’s salvation from spiritual death, completely destroying the power of Satan and bringing to pass the saying: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”³⁴ As long as we trust and obey the Lord God, we will sing triumphant songs of victory over Satan, from now until forever. ★

1. Rom 3:23, 5:12
2. 1 Jn 5:19
3. Rom 1:18–32
4. Mt 16: 23; Lk 12:3; Mk 8:33; Rom 8:5,7
5. Jn 12:31
6. 2 Cor 4:4
7. 1 Jn 3:8
8. Eph 6:12
9. 1 Pet 5:8–9
10. Job 2:3
11. Job 1:12
12. Jn 8:44; 1 Jn 3:8,12
13. Jn 6:70, 13:2
14. 1 Tim 1:19–20
15. Mt 1:21; 1 Tim 1:15
16. Jn 14:6; Acts 11–12
17. Jn 10:17–18
18. Tit 2:14; Heb 9:12–14
19. 1 Cor 6:20, 7:23
20. Acts 26:18; Col 1:13
21. Jn 12:31
22. Jn 16:11
23. Eph 3:10
24. Rom 8:21–24; Eph 1:13–14
25. 1 Cor 15:25
26. Rev 12:11; Col 1:13–14; Gal 3:27
27. Mt 12:28; Rom 8:13
28. Gal 5:25–26; Phil 2:3; 1 Pet 5:5–6
29. Eph 6:10–17; Jas 4:7
30. Rev 2:10; Rom 8:35–39; Acts 20:22–24
31. Rev 12:7–10
32. Rev 20:10
33. Isa 45:7
34. 1 Cor 15:54



Running in the Race of Faith

Based on a sermon by Simon Chin—Singapore

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air.

(1 Cor 9:24–26)

In this passage Paul compares a believer's life of faith to a race. In any secular competition, participants compete hard to win the prize. Unfortunately, be it a simple silver trophy or the much-coveted Olympic gold medal, no prize won in an earthly race lasts forever. In contrast, the race of faith rewards us with an imperishable crown. This crown will be given to us when we enter the kingdom of heaven. As such, this race will be the most important race of our lives. It is literally a matter of eternal life and death.

Unlike the competitive races of the world, the race of faith is not a winner-takes-all competition. The imperishable and glorious crown of righteousness is given to all who

run and complete this race. We must therefore ensure that we have the right strategies to finish the race. What are these?

THE STARTING POINT

In 1 Corinthians 9:26, Paul said that merely running is not sufficient to win the race. To be officially part of any race, we must start from the designated starting point. If we just aimlessly run for five hours, we are like a man beating the air—a lot of energy is expended, but we achieve nothing.

Where then is the starting point in this race of faith? We start the race when we believe in God and faithfully enter into Christ through baptism. We leave our old selves and become a new creation (2 Cor 5:15–17; Rom 6:4–5). How does this happen? Through the correct sacrament of baptism, which is conducted according to biblical teachings, the power of Jesus' blood enables the forgiveness of our sins. As we enter the water to be baptized into the name of Jesus Christ, we must have faith. During baptism, we die with Christ. Hence, we need to be united in the likeness of His death. Jesus hung on the cross for six

hours from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. He then bowed His head and gave up His Spirit when He died. Therefore, when we are baptized into Him, we must also bow our heads as we are immersed in living water.

Having been united with Him in the likeness of His death, we are then united in the likeness of His resurrection. After baptism, we are no longer sinners. We are able to walk in the newness of life, and we can overcome Satan and death. Having resurrected with Christ, we are no longer spiritually dead. This is what Jesus meant when He said, "whoever ... believes in Me shall never die" (Jn 11:26).

It is from this point that we start to run the race. Whatever we have done before baptism in our life of faith is comparable to warming up before the race. Only when we are at the starting point are we officially competing in the race, with a real chance to win the prize.

RUN ACCORDING TO THE RULES

If anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. (2 Tim 2:5)

Many of us have started to run the race. In order to complete it, we must run according to the rules. We cannot merely run as we wish. The rules demand that athletes run the whole distance. An athlete who participates in a 400 meter race but runs only 200 meters cannot claim to have completed the race. Moreover, runners have to stay within their assigned lanes. One who runs the full distance and is the first to cross the finishing line but has not stayed within the assigned lane will still not win the prize. In fact, anyone veering even the barest centimeter to the next lane is immediately and automatically disqualified.

Since we are in a race for eternal life, there is an even greater impetus for us to run according to the rules. In other words, when we believe in Jesus, we must believe in His teachings. We must also believe in what the apostles received from the Lord and imparted to the believers. These are the rules. We have to ensure that what we believe is consistent with these rules.

I have chosen the way of truth; Your judgments I have laid before me. I cling to Your testimonies; O Lord, do not put me to shame! I will run the course of Your commandments, for You shall enlarge my heart.

(Ps 119:30–32)

According to the Psalmist, once we know the word of God, we must lay God's judgments before us, cling to His testimonies, and run the course of His commandments.

Today, some of us who have begun the race may not know the rules or may not know them well enough. The danger for such runners is that they are led in the wrong direction and end up not completing the race. What a pity indeed if the cause of their loss is a lack of deep knowledge of the rules! In addition, runners cannot make up their own rules or their own interpretation of the rules as they go along.

LOOK UP TO JESUS

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

(Heb 12:1–2)

Runners and swimmers know that a good start is key to giving them a competitive edge. However, a good start may be wasted if an athlete gets distracted by things around him. Thus, a third key strategy of winning a race is focus. In our life of faith, our focus is Jesus; we must always to look unto Him. This is done in several ways.

For one thing, as Jesus is our Lord, we must look up to Him. In other words, we must not allow pride in our great running ability to trip us up. No matter how much or how long we have served God or how much the cheering crowds exalt us, we must never forget to look up to Him (cf. Acts 10:26).

Besides setting the right focus, we must not lose focus. According to Hebrews 12:1–2, the witnesses who surround us are those heroes of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11—Abraham who trusted God, Noah who obeyed God, Enoch who walked with God, Sarah who received God's promise with faith, and Moses who gave up his life in the palace to serve God. We have to emulate them in laying aside every weight and sin that easily ensnares us. Turn away from distractions that hinder us from

finishing the race and may lead us to destruction. We must overcome temptations, trials, the evil work of Satan, and even false prophets, and complete the race.

Undoubtedly, in our human frailty, we may feel exhausted and be tempted to give up. During such moments, we must turn our eyes to Jesus so that we do not lose heart. Looking to Him strengthens our hope and enables us to run the race of faith with endurance. This is not an easy race: we must run fast, run with endurance, and run to win the prize.

In this life of faith, our race may be very long, or perhaps very short, depending on when we leave this world. Some are baptized and return to heaven the following week. For most of us, our races are likely to span many years. We must then be very careful—many things will ensnare us and cause us to break the rules, preventing us from completing the race. Let us not allow complacency to set in. It is only when we reach the finishing line of our life that we can declare that we have completed this race.

DO NOT FALL SHORT OF GOD'S GRACE

Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.

(Heb 12:15–17)

In our life of faith, our focus is Jesus; we must always to look unto Him. ... In other words, we must not allow pride in our great running ability to trip us up. No matter how much or how long we have served God or how much the cheering crowds exalt us, we must never forget to look up to Him (cf. Acts 10:26).

Today, we too must submit to the Holy Spirit and the truth. We need the love of God to motivate us to walk according to His commandments. We need to live a life of holiness and godliness in order to complete the race.

In Hebrews 12, besides urging spiritual athletes to stay focused, the author also warns us against falling short of God's grace. This happens when the root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble. In other words, we fall short of God's grace when we allow something to prevent us from competing according to the rules.

The author compares the sin of Esau to that of a fornicator. He was the firstborn of Isaac. By right, he should have received the birthright. However, as a man of the flesh, he sold his birthright to his brother for a bowl of food.

This is a very real and present danger we face. Many have fallen prey to immorality, covetousness, or even faithlessness. They cannot fully obey God, which is tantamount to breaking the rules. Hence, they are unable to finish the race.

Many Christians think that once they are saved, they are forever saved. There are True Jesus Church members who also assume that once they have believed in the truth, they are forever saved. Yet the Bible tells us that if we still commit sin after having been sanctified, we have no share in the kingdom of God.

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

(1 Cor 6:9–11)

The Corinthians were pagans before their conversion to Christianity. Their lives were full of sin. Paul exhorted

them to cease all these unrighteous deeds, since they had been justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of God, and since they were running the race of faith. Otherwise, they would not be able to inherit the kingdom of God. We too have to be very careful of the works of the flesh.

Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

(1 Cor 9:26–27)

This verse summarizes the spiritual cultivation of Apostle Paul. He knew that the lust of the flesh could prevent him from completing the race. Therefore, he relied on the Holy Spirit to put to death the desires of the flesh. He also had the word of God in his heart to sanctify him and allow him to complete the race. Today, we too must submit to the Holy Spirit and the truth. We need the love of God to motivate us to walk according to His commandments. We need to live a life of holiness and godliness in order to complete the race.

FORGET WHAT LIES BEHIND

Lastly, when we run this race, we need to forget what lies behind and look forward to what lies ahead. If we always look back in a race, we may run out of the track and get disqualified.

Who looks back in a race? Those who are very self-confident and think they have already won the race. They enjoy looking back to see who is behind them. In reality, if we really wish to win, we need to stay focused and look ahead. We need to know where the finishing line is—only when we have crossed the finishing line, can we claim victory.

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

(Phil 3:12–14)

This was the attitude of Paul. When he wrote the epistle to the Philippians, he was serving his first imprisonment. Although he had gone on three missionary journeys, established many churches, baptized many people, performed many miracles, and saved many souls, he still strove to forget what was behind to focus on what was before him. Paul knew he had not yet reached the end. He still had to press on towards the finishing line. Paul ran the race right up to the finishing line, which we also have to do.

After Paul was released for a short period, he continued to accomplish what the Lord wanted him to do. Later, during his second imprisonment, Paul knew that death was imminent. When he wrote to Timothy, he could confidently tell him that he had fought the good fight, finished the race, kept the faith, and that the crown of righteousness awaited him. Paul knew this was what the Lord wanted him to do as an apostle of the Gentiles, and he strove towards this goal until the very end.

By God's grace, many of us have believed in the Lord for a long time. His mercy keeps us in the grace of His salvation. Some have done more by bringing many others to church, offering large amounts of money for God, or quietly ministering to fellow members. They have done all these things out of their love for Christ. However, as long as we are alive and the grace of God is with us, we have not finished the race. We must run until the day Jesus receives us back into heaven. We must know

where the finishing line is, and we must never look back to count what we have done for God in the past. If we rest on the laurels of our past achievements, we may stop running the race and hinder our own spiritual growth. We may forget that we are still weak in the flesh and that we have yet to complete the race.

RELY ON JESUS, ENDURE TO THE END

When we believe in Jesus Christ, we join the race of faith. Our goal is to receive this imperishable crown. Hence, we must know where our starting point is and what the rules are. All the “warm-ups” we do before the race, no matter how much effort we put in, only help us to run the race well—they do not guarantee that we can win the prize.

In Paul's last letter, he stated: “I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (2 Tim 2:10).

This was Paul's race, which Christ had given him so that he could win the crown of righteousness. Finally, Paul reminds the elect that “this is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him. If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself” (2 Tim 2:11–13).

The elect are those whom the Lord has chosen for salvation. Only when we die with Christ, will we be ready to live with Him. Only when we endure, can we reign with Him. God's virtues and attributes will never change—even when we deny Him and are faithless, He remains faithful.

When we trust in God, we can complete this race. May we all rely on Christ and on the cleansing power of His blood so that we will abide in God's grace until the very end and receive the imperishable crown. ★

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[W]ho being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. (Heb 1:3)

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us that the Lord Jesus Christ is no ordinary man. He is in fact God who came in the flesh to purge us of our sins. Through His death on the cross, those who believe in Him can be saved. During Jesus' life on earth, He set an example of humility for His disciples to follow. Since He humbled Himself, God raised Him from the dead, and He now sits on the right hand of the Majesty on high.

If a Christian learns the humility of Christ, God will exalt him, and he will have a throne with Christ in heaven. Hence, Jesus told His disciples, "learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart" (Mt 11:29).

JESUS CHRIST DISPLAYED HUMILITY BY EMPTYING HIMSELF

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in

the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. (Phil 2:5-7)

Since Jesus Christ had come in the likeness of men, He kept His duty as a man and did not exalt Himself to be God. This was the humility of Jesus before God, and this is the humility that all Christians must have.

The One True God is the only self-existing One, and all things come from Him (Col 1:16). We should not commit the mistake of Adam and Eve who failed to humble themselves as Christ did. Being tempted, they tried to be equal with God (Gen 3:4–6). As a consequence, they lost their blessings and honor as children of God.

In fact, they were the first couple created by God. They should have been more assured than anyone else that God is the Creator and they should have kept to their proper domain as created beings. Lifting themselves up to be equal with God was pure arrogance, because the Creator and the creature are not on equal footing.

Similarly, the angels who became proud sinned against God (Jude 6). Like man, angels are created beings. Yet they wanted to exalt themselves to be like God and opposed the will of God (Isa 14:12–15). Their end is the lake of fire and brimstone, where they will face eternal torment (Rev 20:10).

Therefore, we ought to understand what our proper domain is and remain within it, submitting to God's will. This requires that we empty ourselves, forsaking our own will if it conflicts with God's will. Sometimes, it may seem quite difficult to forsake our personal rights, interests, desires, and pride. But since Jesus did it out of His great love for us, His love should compel us to do the same.

JESUS CHRIST DISPLAYED HUMILITY BY SUBMITTING TO GOD'S WILL

And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. (Phil 2:8)

Although Jesus Christ asked the heavenly Father to take away the

bitter cup, He humbled Himself before God and willingly submitted to do God's will (Lk 22:42), even to death on the cross. This was an important display of Jesus' humility before God.

God created the heavens and the earth; all inhabitants of the world ought to stand in awe of Him (Ps 33:6–8). God spoke and it was done. He commanded and it stood fast. Nothing that exists came into being by itself, by the natural law, or because of cause and effect. Instead, all things came into being by the word of God and are upheld by the power of His word (Heb 1:3).

Since we are created by God, it is only reasonable that we obey and submit to the Creator, because the created being depends on the Creator to live. We ought not think too highly of ourselves and refuse to submit to the will of God. This would lead to our destruction. Take the analogy of a fish. God created fish and placed them to live in the sea. But if one fish decides to go against God's commandment and insists on staying on land, it will not survive. When it dies, we cannot blame God. Likewise, if we do not listen to the word of God, like the fish insisting on living on land, our end is death. By disobeying God, we have sought our own death. This simple analogy tells us that we have to live according to the will of God. Jesus tells us that, "[m]an does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Mt 4:4). His words are command, and they are life (cf. Jn 6:63, 12:49–50).

Jesus' humility and submission to God's will led Him to even lay down His life on the cross for us so that we could receive the grace of salvation. Initially, this grace was meant for the Jews. But because they resisted God's word, and rejected Jesus, we have

received this grace and have been grafted onto the true vine. Let us humble ourselves and submit to do God's word in our daily life.

JESUS CHRIST DISPLAYED HUMILITY BY TAKING THE FORM OF A BONDSERVANT

[W]ho, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. (Phil 2:6–7)

When Christ humbled Himself to take on the form of a man, He chose the lowliest of all possible, that of being a bondservant. As such, the humility of Christ would truly put to shame the humility that any of us can have. We dare not boast that we are humble because our humility cannot be compared with Christ's. The humility of Christ also silences the pride in our heart. There are many who have lost themselves in pursuit for power and status, and there are others who try to defend and keep a certain appearance before men. However, Christ took on the form of a bondservant.

Thus, all Christians ought to learn from the humility of Christ. Even though we are not bondservants, yet before God, we willingly take on the form of a bondservant. This means that we have to learn to become a slave to God, to have the spirit of a bondservant of God. What sort of spirit or attitude is this?

Do Everything for God's Glory

A bondservant does everything to glorify the master and not to bring glory to himself, for such was Christ.

I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You

have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

(Jn 17:4–5)

Jesus tells us that everything He did in the world was to glorify the heavenly Father. As Jesus' disciples, we have to consider whether our actions glorify God or ourselves. The prophet Isaiah teaches us that the will of God is for us to bring glory to Him:

Everyone who is called by My name, Whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him. (Isa 43:7)

We may ask, "Why would God want man to glorify Him?" In fact, God wants His chosen people to enjoy and experience the glory that He Himself has. Since we are called by God's name, we are His children and part of His body. So when God is glorified, we share in His glory. Out of His unconditional love, He lifted up lowly men like us to share in His eternal glory.

Do Not Expect Any Reward

Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, "We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do."

(Lk 17:9–10)

As faithful servants, we do everything according to the master's command. Should the master thank the servant? Jesus said, "When you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'" We dare not ask for any reward or wait for the master to thank us, because we are merely servants and our work is our duty.

In the past, we were sinners. But Jesus Christ, the majestic and honorable God in heaven, took the

Today, let us learn from Jesus' humility by allowing His great love to continuously inspire us to empty ourselves and submit to His words, acknowledging God's will as superior to our own will. This requires us to forsake our personal interests when we serve God. It also demands that we look out for the needs of others.

form of a bondservant in order to save us from eternal condemnation. Jesus was a man without sin and yet He served without seeking for reward. Shouldn't we who were once sinners serve even more diligently without expecting any reward?

If we realize just how unworthy we are of such grace, we will not only be filled with gratitude, we will serve Him willingly and faithfully all the days of our lives. We will cherish our status as servant of the Lord and view this as something glorious.

Submit Yourself to the Master

A bondservant will submit himself completely to the master. This is what Christ has done.

[W]ho, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear. (Heb 5:7)

When Christ prayed to God to deliver Him, He also said, "Father, not according to My will, but according to Your will." He was willing to submit to God's will and give up His own will because He knew that He was God's servant and that God's will is the best. As a result, Jesus' prayer was heard. Jesus has taught us how to offer godly prayer, which requires that we forgo our own will and subject ourselves fully to God. Yet in many instances, unknowingly, we doubt God's will, and we pray to God to fulfill our will instead.

Even Jesus had to suffer to learn obedience. All the more, we, who are His disciples, need to learn from His humility to obey God as a bondservant obeys his master. Such submission can complete us so that eventually we will be raised to sit together with God.

Serve Others

Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest. And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship

over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.' "But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves.

(Lk 22:24–26)

When Jesus told His disciples of His impending arrest and death, one would have expected them to be sad. Instead, this solemn news sparked off a dispute among them on who would be considered the greatest after their leader's departure!

Jesus was still with them, and they were already fighting for the greatest position. How disappointed Jesus must have felt! The disciples' dispute demonstrated that they did not understand Jesus' statement, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" and, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.' But not so among you" (Lk 22:25–26).

Let us not follow the ways of the world to seek for positions of power to lord over others. In the house of God, the opposite is true. The greatest should be the servant of all. Our Lord has set this example for us. We have to learn from the humility of Christ to take the form of a bondservant and be willing to serve others.

Wash Each Other's Feet

A bondservant washes the feet of others. On the night of the last supper, Jesus laid aside His outer garment, girded Himself with a towel, and did something that alarmed His disciples. He knelt down to wash their feet, a task that was normally performed by servants.

This was why Peter said to Jesus, "You shall never wash my feet," for Jesus was his master. Yet Christ took the form of a bondservant and willingly washed the disciples' feet, even the feet of the one who would betray Him. This is what moves us, and this is the humility of Christ that we need to emulate.

Today, we may be willing to wash the feet of those whom we owe a great debt, but there are feet of others that we are not willing to wash. When Jesus Christ washed the disciples' feet, He even washed the feet of Judas Iscariot. In the church, is there anyone's feet that we would refuse to wash? Who has betrayed us in the same way as Judas betrayed Jesus? No one has gone to that extent; they may have only angered us. Thus, we have to learn from the humility of Christ to take on the form of a bondservant, to forgive, and to love even those who have offended us.

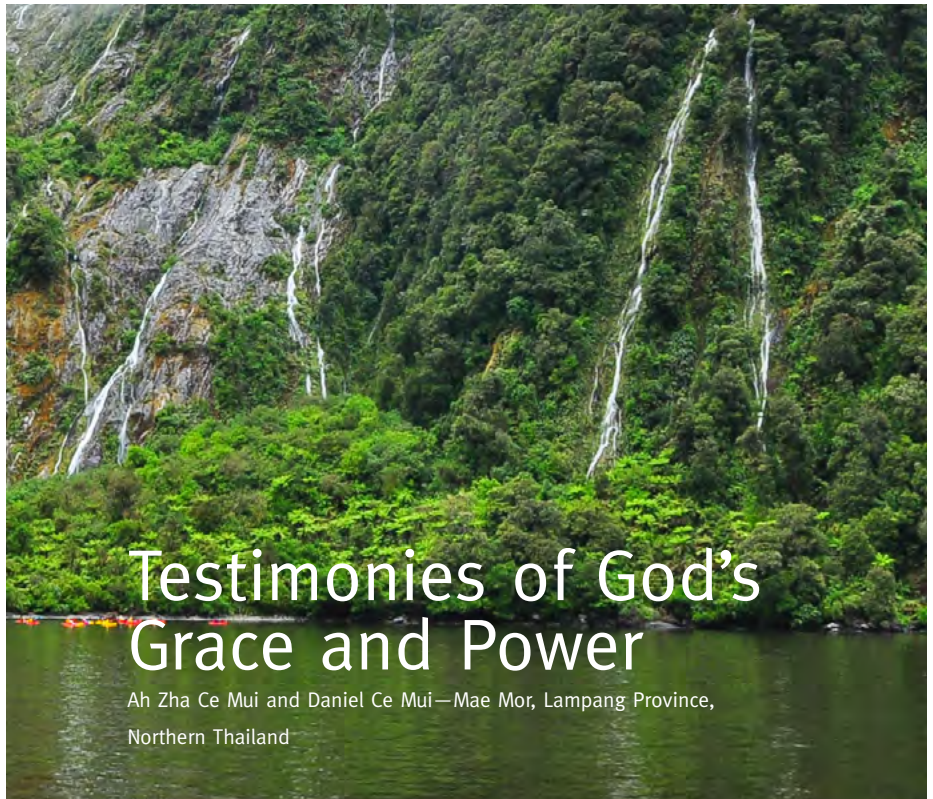
We must always remember that it is the devil who teaches man to harbor hatred and to refuse to forgive. On the other hand, the Lord tells us to forgive others just as He has forgiven us. This reason alone should be strong enough to motivate us.

STEP INTO JESUS' FOOTPRINTS OF HUMILITY

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, left His heavenly glory to come into this world in the likeness of man. Out of all human conditions, He chose the lowliest—that of a humble bondservant. Moreover, He manifested His humility by emptying Himself and submitting to do God's word.

Today, let us learn from Jesus' humility by allowing His great love to continuously inspire us to empty ourselves and submit to His words, acknowledging God's will as superior to our own will. This requires us to forsake our personal interests when we serve God. It also demands that we look out for the needs of others, prioritizing them over ours.

Finally, let us learn from Jesus' spirit as a bondservant whose thoughts, words, and deeds always glorified God, and who served with true gratitude. He served without expecting any reward, and He obeyed God in all things. If we follow Jesus' footprints of humility, we will eventually fulfill God's purpose in our life and learn to love others just as Christ has loved us. ★



Testimonies of God's Grace and Power

Ah Zha Ce Mui and Daniel Ce Mui—Mae Mor, Lampang Province,
Northern Thailand

Ah Zha Ce Mui (born 1985) and Daniel Ce Mui (born 1995) are members of the True Jesus Church in Thailand. They were both born in the Akha village in Myanmar but now live in Mae Mor, Northern Thailand.

RECEIVING THE HOLY SPIRIT

by Ah Zha Ce Mui



I am from the Akha¹ tribe of Myanmar, and I travel frequently between the mountainous border of southern Myanmar and northern Thailand. Before my first visit to the Mae Mor True Jesus Church, I was already a Christian.

In May 2007, the True Jesus Church conducted a spiritual and evangelistic convocation at a rented metal shack in Mae Mor village. During that convocation, a preacher from Taiwan bore testimony of the

gospel of Jesus. After the sermon, another preacher led everyone in prayer. He asked everyone to pray earnestly and loudly in the name of the Lord Jesus for the Holy Spirit from the true God. When they knelt down to pray, many spoke in a language that I did not understand, and their bodies vibrated. I was truly amazed, for I had never seen prayers like this. In fact, I found the prayer rather strange and comical.

Subsequently, I knelt down to pray together with them. I prayed very earnestly. Approximately four minutes into the prayer, I saw a glorious light. I saw Jesus nailed on the cross and immediately, I wept. I felt a profound sorrow to see Jesus dying in such a painful way for us sinners. My tears flowed ceaselessly and I cried out loudly. Then, I began to speak in an unknown language.

When the prayer ended, I was still weeping. Through an interpreter, one of the preachers asked me why I was in tears. I then told everyone

¹ The Akha is one of the largest indigenous hill tribes living in Thailand's northern provinces of Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai.

the vision I had seen during my prayer. Later, the preacher studied the Bible with me and showed me records in the Bible of people who spoke in tongues and whose bodies vibrated when they received the Holy Spirit. The actions of the people in prayer that I had initially considered comical were actually the evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit.

Thank the Lord Jesus for His grace. Had it not been for the vision that the Lord Jesus allowed me to see and the bestowing of the precious Holy Spirit, I would not have known that the True Jesus Church is the church where God abides through the presence of the Holy Spirit and that this church can truly lead one unto salvation. After that spiritual and evangelistic convocation, I received the correct form of baptism in accordance with the Bible and became a member of the church that is saved.

May all glory be given unto the holy name of the Lord Jesus. Hallelujah, Amen.

A SERIOUS ACCIDENT

by Daniel Ce Mui



In 2006, when I was eleven years old, my family moved from Myanmar to northern Thailand. In order to adapt to the local life and to integrate better into the society, I began attending a Thai school. I also took up Chinese lessons at a Chinese school.

In 2011, I asked my parents to transfer me to another school because I did not like the school that I was attending. When they refused, I angrily told them I would stop attending school. Thinking that this was just a passing whim, my parents did not take my request seriously. But when the school semester was about to commence, I still refused to register

I saw a glorious light. I saw Jesus nailed on the cross and immediately, I wept. I felt a profound sorrow to see Jesus dying in such a painful way for us sinners. My tears flowed ceaselessly and I cried out loudly. Then, I began to speak in an unknown language.

at the school and told my parents that I wanted to work instead. It was then that they realized that I was adamant about switching schools. After some thought, they asked me what would persuade me to continue attending that school. I negotiated for a motorcycle. A month later, my new motorcycle arrived and I happily rode to school on it every day.

In 2011, one day after class, a teacher asked me to send her to another school. After dropping my teacher off on my motorcycle, I sped home. Because I was speeding, I was unable to stop in time when a car suddenly emerged from a small lane. I crashed into the car. The impact was so great that my new motorcycle was totally wrecked and I lost consciousness on the spot. When I woke up, I realized that both my arms were fractured. I was in such agony that I cried out loudly to God to deliver me. Unable to move, all I could do was to close my eyes and pray to God in great misery. The residents nearby sent me to the hospital.

My parents rushed to the hospital to see me. They prayed with me and encouraged me to rely on God. After our prayer, I told my father that I did not want any metal pins inserted in my arms. The doctor insisted that the metal pins were an indispensable form of support for my arms to speed up the recovery process. However, later, in the operating theatre, when the doctor removed the splint to prepare for the operation he found to his utter amazement that my left arm had healed. The doctor was stunned and perplexed because the x-ray of my left arm clearly showed a fracture. How could it be that at this point in time, my arm was perfectly fine? I knew immediately that this

was God's healing. I was so moved that I wept there.

The other arm was, however, still fractured and the doctor insisted once again that metal pins had to be inserted. However, I was even more adamant about not undergoing surgery. Seeing that I was so resolute, the doctor had no other choice but to allow me to return home to recuperate.

After I returned home, I used herbal medicine to treat my arms and prayed continuously for the healing of the Lord. Soon, the injuries to my right arm and on my legs healed. However, I was still unable to bend my index finger and to write with my right hand. Hoping to recover even faster, I prayed earnestly to God. Thank God for listening to my prayers! Within a short span of time, my index finger recovered. Soon, I was able to resume attending services. God is indeed the almighty doctor.

This incident taught me how to rely on God and helped me to grow tremendously in my faith. Now I understand that the accident was part of God's grace to enable me to understand His great love and power. I have truly learned to pray ceaselessly, because prayer is such an important means for us to experience God and to rely on Him.

May all glory be given to the holy name of the Lord Jesus. Hallelujah, Amen.

SAVED FROM DROWNING

by Daniel Ce Mui

One day in February 2013, I arranged with six of my classmates—five girls and a boy—to go out together after our classes. With the exception of my male classmate, all of us are from the True Jesus Church. It was a fine and sunny afternoon. As we were riding around, we spotted a reservoir near our school. None of us knew the topography of the reservoir sandbank as well as the water depth. But the sparkling water looked so inviting, we excitedly decided to spend the rest of the afternoon there.

Soon everyone was having a great time swimming and horsing around in the cool water. One of the girls, Ye Lisha, was enjoying herself in the water so much that she did not realize that she was getting farther and farther away from the bank. It was only when she lost her footing that she suddenly realized that she had reached a very deep part of the reservoir. Not knowing how to swim, she went under very quickly. Another classmate, Zhang Huiya, who had been standing closest to her, grabbed her but was pulled down into the

water as well. A third classmate, Luo Huiling who saw Lisha and Huiya thrashing about in the water, initially thought they were fooling around. When she realized that they were in trouble, she rushed over to try to save them. But she too was pulled underwater amidst the chaos and confusion.

Subsequently, my male classmate heard their pleas for help. He quickly dived in to try to save them but was also unsuccessful. When I noticed them sinking one by one, I dived in with no second thought and quickly swam over. Since I was the strongest, all four of them clung onto me very tightly and struggled to float to the surface. Their collective weight caused me to be completely submerged. I was terrified knowing that I was about to die. I tried to shout for help but swallowed lots of water the minute I opened my mouth. At that instant, I prayed to God in my heart, “Lord Jesus please save me! Today, if You do not save us, we will all drown.”

All this time, the two younger classmates left on shore, Zhang Huali and Zhang Huixian, had been continually shouting for help, but

there was no one near the reservoir. They too were worried to death. Unable to do anything else, they could only remain on shore and cry to God for help.

At this precarious moment between life and death, the Lord heard our prayers and stretched out His almighty hands. Amazingly, all of us who had sunk into the water were literally catapulted to the shore one by one (this was personally witnessed by the two classmates who had remained on the shore). We knew nothing of this because the five of us in the water had already become unconscious. When we regained consciousness, we found ourselves lying on the reservoir shore.

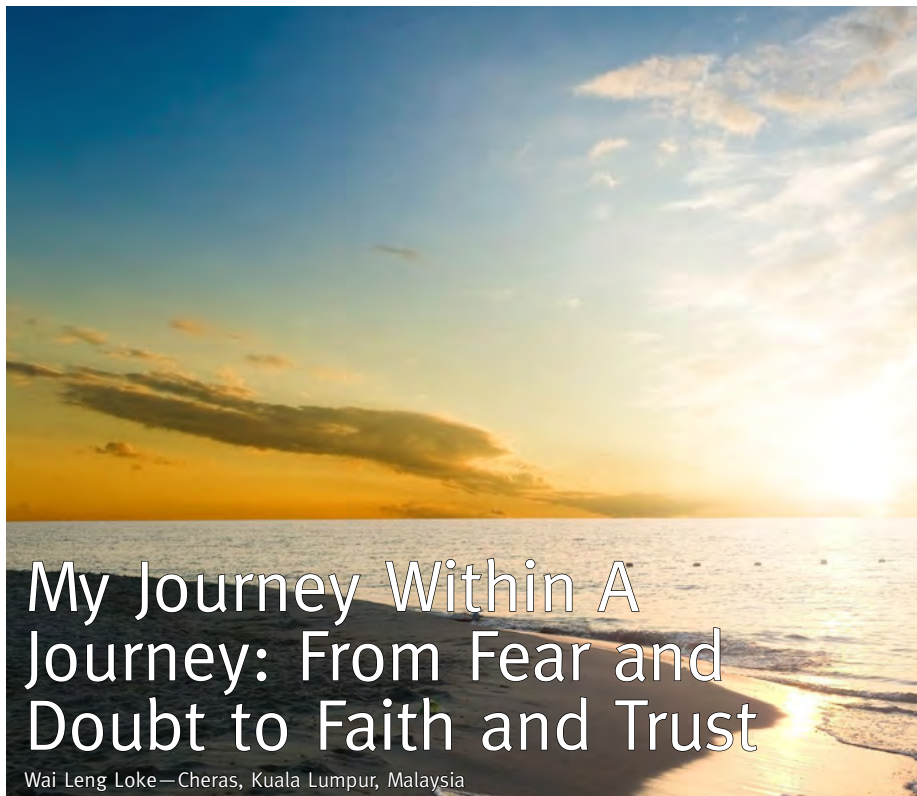
This was indeed the great deliverance of the Lord Jesus. Not only did He save us, He did it in the most remarkable way. Without this mighty Savior, we would not be here testifying to His amazing grace today. I shall surely remember His goodness and mercy all the days of my life. May all glory be given to the holy name of the Lord Jesus. ★



Witnessed the Lord’s catapult: Zhang Huali, Zhang Huixian



Rescued by the Lord from the watery depths.: Ye Lisha, Zhang Huiya, Luo Huiling, Daniel (Ah Luo) Ce Mui



I have often heard of the church's missionary trips to India. While I admired the courage and zeal of those who served in the ministry, I never expected to step foot on this sub-continent of South Asia.

One day, when I received an invitation out of the blue to assist in the religious education work in India, I was overjoyed. As I listened to the coordinator of this ministry describing how I could help, my heart raced with excitement. But I could not shake off a nagging sense of inadequacy when I thought of my limitations and lack of knowledge and experience. I was worried that I could not adapt to the living conditions there. Moreover, memories of lurid reports of serious crimes in India during that period crowded my mind, dampening my initial enthusiasm. Indeed, beyond this missionary journey, I would have to undertake my own personal journey of faith.

MILESTONE 1. ENTRUSTING TO GOD

The first and most immediate bridge that I had to cross was parental consent. Not surprisingly, my parents were very anxious when they learned

of my intention to go on this trip. My father mentioned the recent spate of crimes in India reported in the newspapers, hoping that these would deter me. As the days passed, the continuing accounts of the crimes on India were steadily eroding my resolve to join the missionary work. On top of this, I began to worry about my assigned tasks, as I did not know where to start with my preparation work. It was getting all so stressful that I harbored a secret hope that the trip would be canceled. Thus did I struggle for a few weeks, worrying and yet not willing to let go of this wonderful opportunity. Finally, a few brethren and I decided to pray about this matter.

One evening after service, I shared my foremost worry—my safety—with a preacher. Immediately, he assured me: "Just go. Jesus will take care of you. He will take care of all His servants. Just go. And go with faith." Suddenly, I felt as if God Himself had said these words to me, with His full authority and reassurance. Joy and faith in God filled me (Jn 14:1).

"Lord, I'll go where You want me to go!"

The next morning, I told my parents about my decision and asked them not to worry, assuring them that my God would definitely take care of His workers.

MILESTONE 2. DOING MY PART

I received another call from the Education Affairs unit of the Indian Mission Committee confirming the trip. My co-workers would be two sisters, one of whom had been actively participating in missionary trips to India and Africa for more than a decade and is still passionately involved in this area of divine work. She and another sister were a tremendous source of help in my preparation for both my trip and my assignment.

In addition, I did some research about the subjects I was to teach during the trip. I also read up about the climate and the different cultures in India, prepared medication, and sought advice from various ministers and brethren who had been to India before.

After preparing all that I could and needed to, a new worry struck me: I would have to explain and elaborate on these topics with nothing more

REFLECTION 1: TAKE THAT STEP!

At the Red Sea, Moses only had to stretch out his hand and the LORD parted the waters so that the children of Israel could cross the sea on dry ground (Ex 14:21, 22). But at the River Jordan, when the Israelites were about to enter the promised land, God wanted them to cross the river when it was overflowing and when the current was strongest. God commanded the priests bearing the ark of the LORD to step into the water and promised that the waters flowing downstream would be cut off and would stand up as a heap (Jos 3:13–16). Had we been among the priests, would we have taken that step?

It is easy to pray to God for more faith in Him. But the true test comes when we have to leave our comfort zone and translate knowledge and belief into action. It is difficult for us to take the first step because we tend to walk by sight and not by faith. When we no longer see the familiar and comforting, when we stare nervously at the strong current and the overflowing waters in front of us and remember only our limitations, we forget that our God is almighty. We must remind ourselves that God is in control and that He will help us to accomplish His will. But we must have the courage to take the first step. Belief and action—that is true faith.

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding;
In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct your paths. (Prov 3:5, 6)*

The Bible provides us with countless reminders of how God makes possible the impossible—He parted the Red Sea (Ex 14:21); Jesus gave the blind sight (Mk 10:46–52), walked on water (Mt 14:25), calmed the wind and the waves (Lk 8:22–25); He even raised the dead to life (Jn 11:38–44). What else is there that our Lord cannot do for us?

For me personally, what I needed to do was to take my eyes off the overflowing waters of my worries, and take that first step of entrusting the whole trip and divine work into His mighty hands.

than just occasional glances at my lecture notes! I was not sure I had sufficient wisdom and eloquence. In fact, I felt woefully inadequate. Then I remembered what God had said to His servant Moses:

Who has made man's mouth? (Ex 4:11a)

Once again, I consciously turned my eyes upon Jesus. I resolved to pray and ask for God's full guidance to enable me to speak fluently and to serve according to His will.

My co-workers and I met at Kuala Lumpur International Airport on May 15, 2013 to embark on our journey to India. I usually dread flying but somehow this flight was different. As our plane shot up into the light blue sky, I thought about the greatness and the almightiness of God, the Creator of the heavens

and the earth and everything in it. My usual fear was replaced by a sense of serenity, an absolute conviction that everything would be well in His mighty hands. Before long, we were at Chennai, India, walking out to the welcoming smiles of the local deacon and preachers.

MILESTONE 3. SEEING AND EXPERIENCING THE WONDERFUL WORK OF GOD

During my two-week stay in India, I truly experienced God's working; with God, nothing is impossible (Lk 1:37).

It was summer and very hot. In the sweltering heat of the day, I was often bathed in perspiration. Even when I was comfortably lying in bed at night with the ceiling fan at full blast, my clothes would be soaked. But the heat did not hinder my work at all. And amazingly, none of us suffered from heat stroke, serious dehydration, or diarrhea, not even after accidentally having a cold drink sold by a roadside vendor!¹

Then on another day, a preacher informed us that a week before, a major typhoon was heading towards the area we were in. Surprisingly, the wind had suddenly changed course and headed towards the opposite direction instead. Had it not been for the grace and protection of our merciful God, our church and training center in Ambattur, Chennai would have been affected by the typhoon and the rest of our trip might then have had to be canceled.

God's abidance when we commenced our work was also manifested. When I began my classes, I discovered that my earlier fears were completely unfounded. Words flowed spontaneously, and I was able to lecture smoothly. I was once worried I would not have enough examples to share. The reality was I ran out of time! Thank God for His guidance.

MILESTONE 4. ENJOYING THE UNITY IN CHRIST**One in Ministry**

As we served together, my co-workers and I saw that God indeed had His own good will in all that He had arranged for us. We could see that He had put us together as co-workers because we complemented each other in terms of knowledge, skills, and even in our way of thinking and physical strength! Praise the Lord!

¹ Travel advisories to India generally caution against consumption of food and drinks from roadside vendors because of the high probability of food contamination.

It is easy to pray to God for more faith in Him. But the true test comes when we have to leave our comfort zone and translate knowledge and belief into action.

REFLECTION 2: TAKE THAT STEP!

Deep down inside most of us, there have been times when we wanted to do something for the Lord. However, before we even begin, we are bogged down with a long list of negative thoughts. These often so overwhelm us that we surrender to our pessimism, and we give up without even trying. Yet, have we considered that God’s work is accomplished through His power and not our own limited wisdom or strength?

*So the LORD said to him, “Who has made man’s mouth? ... Have not I, the LORD?”
“Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say.”
(Ex 4:11a, 12)*

Once again, we need to return to the exhortations of the apostles. Even the great apostle Paul was troubled by his weakness. But he shared what the Lord had said to reassure him, “My grace is sufficient for you: for my strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9a).

And Elder James tells us how to overcome our anxieties: “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind” (Jas 1:5, 6).

For ... we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function. (Rom 12:4)

One Family

Not only did I enjoy the blessing of serving together with my brethren, I was truly touched by their warmth—people whom I had never met before, but whose love transcended race, culture, and geographical boundaries because God first loved us.

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (1 Jn 4:11)

One day, a brother drove us to a church in Chengalput, around 1.5 hours’ drive from our training center at Ambattur. As I am prone to motion sickness, the journey was a great torture for me. We had to make a stop by the roadside so that I could recover from my terrible nausea and dizziness. I felt very bad to have caused everyone so much inconvenience, but the brethren were very kind and understanding, going to great lengths to look for remedies for my condition.

Moreover, throughout our trip, our Indian sisters put in a lot of effort to prepare traditional Indian dishes, snacks, and drinks for our meals.

There was never a time that we went hungry! The two weeks whizzed by because these brethren had truly provided us with a home away from home.

I truly thank God for His love that was manifested through His servants. Besides the local members, our brethren back home had been incessantly interceding for us, and my co-workers provided loving support in both word and deed (1 Jn 3:18). Their examples have taught me to also show sincere care and concern towards others.

CONCLUSION

The whole course ran smoothly. Thank God for His great love, grace, and protection throughout our two-week stay in India. Words will not suffice to describe my gratitude for the wonderful opportunity to work together with good co-workers, to be able to serve our brethren in India, and to witness for myself the wonderful works of God.

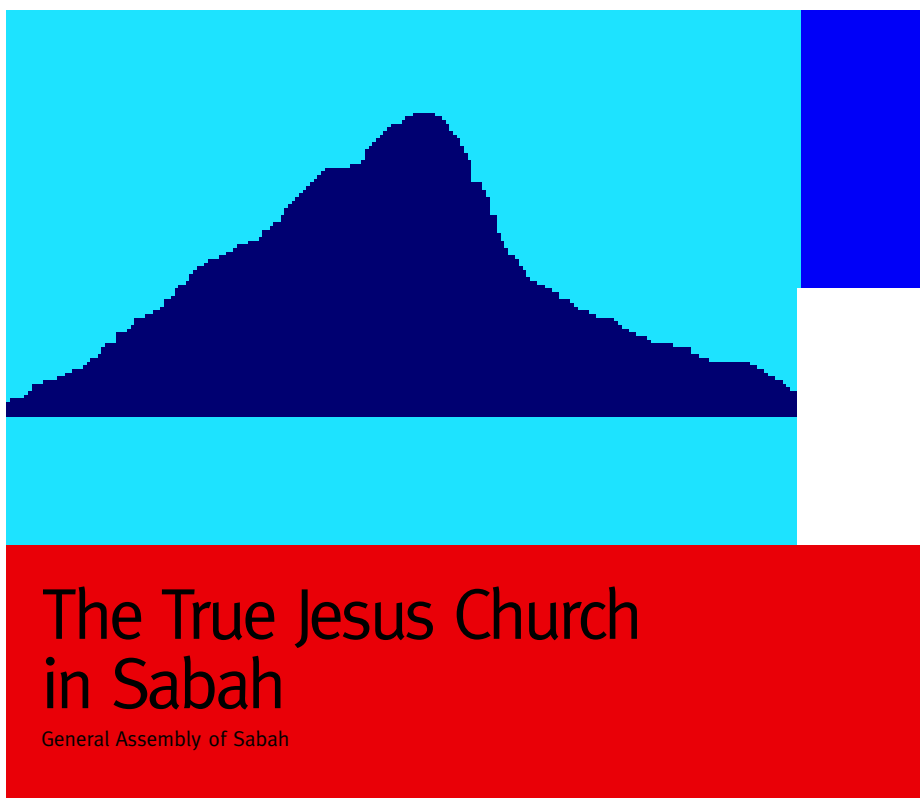
I was asked to teach but by God’s wonderful mercy, this missionary trip taught me many precious lessons. Not only did I learn to acknowledge my own weaknesses and shortcomings, “for when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor 12:10), but I also realized that even in my weakness, I can still do more for God through Christ who strengthens me—both physically and spiritually (Phil 4:13).

I learned to cast all my cares upon our heavenly Father through constant prayers (1 Pet 5:7), to put my fears behind, and to trust in God. I also learned to trust in His arrangement and providence, for He sees all our needs and He works in ways we cannot see. If I had set my eyes only on the strong currents and had not taken the first step to accept God’s calling, I would not have witnessed how God works through His servants. He strengthened my faith in Him and cleared my doubts. I am now eagerly looking forward to my next calling.

All praise and glory be to our Lord Jesus. Amen. ★



True Jesus Church Chengalput, India



The True Jesus Church in Sabah

General Assembly of Sabah

After the True Jesus Church's establishment in China in 1917, the gospel spread to Taiwan, Singapore, and subsequently to Sabah, which was then known as North Borneo. Although Sabah is now part of Malaysia, it has its own General Assembly due to historical developments and geographical reasons. In this article, we will present the history of the True Jesus Church in Sabah and give an overview of its current status.

BRIEF HISTORY

1920s

In 1927, two True Jesus Church deacons from West Malaysia visited Singapore; one of them, Deacon (Dn.) John Vun, sent a copy of the Holy Spirit Monthly magazine to Sabah (formerly known as North Borneo, a British colony). The magazine came into the possession of a pious believer from the Seventh Day Adventist church. His name was Lee Siak Lin who became the first seed of the True Jesus Church in Sabah.

Filled with zeal after reading the Holy Spirit Monthly, Lee Siak Lin boarded a ship to Singapore to look for Dn. Vun to study the truth. Once he understood, he accepted the truth and was baptized. He then invited Dn. Vun to preach the gospel in Sabah. Dn. Vun obliged and together with a few co-workers, they sailed to Sabah. While in Sabah, they witnessed the amazing work of the Holy Spirit. Miracles and signs abounded. A

person crushed to death by a big tree was revived after prayers. Every night believers went to a mountain to pray and hold services. Many received the Holy Spirit.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, many believed in the Lord in those early days; the number of believers soon exceeded five hundred. The gospel spread rapidly to the Chinese community. By 1930, eight churches and prayer houses had been established.

1930s

In 1934, a Chinese businessman by the name of Chin Chin Chan (Dn. John Chin) from Tuaran, on the West coast of Sabah, took his twelve-year-old son to Fuzhou, China, to learn Chinese. There, he came to believe in the Lord and was baptized in the True Jesus Church in Dagen, Fuzhou.

In 1935, he returned to Sabah and immediately put up a True Jesus Church signboard above his shop. He started preaching the gospel and held services at his shop every night.

Around thirty-five people attended services at that time.

During that period, Dn. Chin contracted severe tuberculosis. He prayed and vowed that if God healed him, he would become a full-time evangelist. Miraculously, he was cured. Dn. Chin kept his word and traveled extensively to preach the gospel. His son, Dn. Samuel Chin, one of our early workers, also became an evangelist.

Dn. Samuel Chin's wife was from the Dusun tribe, the largest indigenous tribe in Sabah. Through her contacts, the gospel was preached to her relatives in the Dusun dominated areas. In 1936, the first indigenous church was established. Through the working of the Holy Spirit, the gospel was subsequently preached to other indigenous tribes, such as the Murut tribe, in the interior regions of Sabah.

1940s–1950s

During the Second World War, between 1942 and 1945, the church ceased to hold services; believers had



Position of Sabah in South-East Asia



True Jesus Church Kota Kinabalu

to flee from the Japanese soldiers and went into hiding. Yet, by God's grace, the believers continued to gather and hold family services.

1960s–1970s

In the 1960s and 1970s, the church in Sabah experienced rapid growth. From 1964 to 1965, the General Assembly of Taiwan sent Dn. John Yang and Dn. Lin Feng Lai to Sabah to assist in the holy work. These two early workers helped to establish the foundation of the pastoral and evangelistic work in Sabah; their main contribution being the cultivation of religious education teachers. If we look back at the history of the church in Sabah, we can see that

God has especially blessed the local religious education work. Many of our current ordained ministers, both preachers and deacons, were religious education teachers trained by Dn. John Yang in the 1960s and 1970s.

Administration and Facilities

In 1927, when the true church was first established in Sabah, it was under the administration of the General Assembly (GA) of mainland China and was known as the "North Borneo Branch" with its liaison center in Sandakan.

In 1945, after the Second World War, the state capital of North Borneo was relocated from Sandakan

to Jesselton (now Kota Kinabalu) by the government. Various church denominations were advised to re-register with the authorities.

In 1952, our church also re-registered as the "Branch Board of the True Jesus Church" under the administration of the General Assembly of Mainland China, with its office at Jesselton.

In 1975 Sabah officially established its own General Assembly.

In 1981, the Kota Kinabalu church constructed a five-storey administrative building. As Sabah GA was without a proper office at the time, it shared an office with the Kota Kinabalu church.

In 2009, the Sabah GA constructed its own five-storey administrative building, with facilities such as a theological seminary, conference hall, library, hostel, and multipurpose hall.

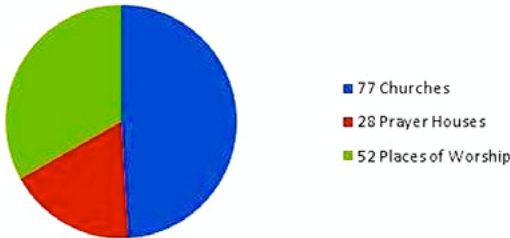
In 1927, two True Jesus Church deacons from West Malaysia visited Singapore; one of them, Deacon John Yun, sent a copy of the Holy Spirit Monthly magazine to Sabah ... The magazine came into the possession of a pious believer from the Seventh Day Adventist church. His name was Lee Siak Lin who became the first seed of the True Jesus Church in Sabah.



CURRENT SITUATION

The Churches

Churches, Prayer Houses, Places of Worship in Sabah



Membership and Workers

Membership, ministers, and full-time GA staff					
Total membership:	Elders:	Preachers:	Deacons:	Theological students:	Full-time GA staff:
15,801	10	24	148	3	5

The Three Pastoral Zones

In order to facilitate pastoral and evangelistic work, the Sabah churches are divided into three pastoral zones: West Coast Zone, East Coast Zone, and Interior Zone.

The West Coast Zone consists of four sub-zones, Beaufort in the south-west, Kudat in the most northern part of Sabah, Tuaran in the north-west, and Kota Kinabalu, the state capital. Although the last three sub-zones

do not occupy large geographical areas, they have the highest number of believers and churches, and their congregations comprise members of Chinese origin and from indigenous tribes. Most of our churches in Sabah are situated in the West Coast Zone, and eleven preachers are assigned to take care of this zone.

The East Coast Zone is located in the eastern region of Sabah. There are fewer churches there. The churches

are very far from one another, but they have large congregations. Hence, there are a number of large church buildings in the East Coast Zone. This zone is divided into three sub-zones: Sandakan, Lahad Datu, and Tawau.

The Interior Zone is divided into five sub-zones: Bingkor, Tenom, Kemabong, Nabawan, and Pensiangan. Bingkor and Tenom are the only two areas with Chinese brethren in the Interior Zone. Pensiangan is located in a very remote region of Sabah, near the border of Indonesia.

Beyond the shores of Sabah, the GA also cares for the churches in the neighboring Malaysian state of Sarawak as well as a small island called Labuan, which is under the management of Malaysia's Federal Territory.

Sarawak is the largest state in Malaysia, with a population of 2,470,000. Over 75% of the population are Christians, and there are many Chinese who speak the Minnan and Fuzhou dialects. Yet we have only two prayer houses in this state. Hence, it is our vision to mobilize more manpower to pioneer the gospel in the state of Sarawak and to save more souls for the Lord. ★






Treasured Moments with God: How God Walked With Me Through Graduate School

Lois Kuo—Pacifica, California, USA

FROM THE START

It was my first day in a new city. I had been caught up in a frenzy of packing after a summer crammed with church events. It was not until I was sitting alone on an unfamiliar bed in my unfamiliar room that I was suddenly struck by the immensity of being so far from everyone and everything I knew. “What have I gotten myself into?” The thought literally immobilized me. I didn’t know what to do or where to go.

At that moment, my cell phone rang. It was a local church sister, telling me that another sister was visiting from abroad. She would be taking her to see the sights of the city and invited me to go along. I was flooded with relief and gratitude to God. He had known how I would feel and had prepared this invitation to help me break out of my paralysis. This is how God helped me from the first day of my graduate school journey.

While getting to know the surroundings and local church members, in the newness of it all, I forgot my fear. But on the first day of class, the feeling of intense dread returned. “Why did I do this? Why did I come here? I know nothing

about journalism!” I had a knot in my stomach and I felt nauseous. I opened my Bible to read a passage, knowing I would have to dash off to class immediately after. I happened to be reading Daniel chapter 1. When I read verse 17, it stopped me in my tracks: “As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom.”

I felt God’s comfort through the verse. Daniel was not only in a foreign place, but in a foreign country. How insecure he must have felt living in a foreign king’s palace! If God could give Daniel wisdom in literature, He could also give me knowledge of journalism. Suddenly, my heart was calm. I knew that I was here to study for God, so what did I have to fear?

GOD WAS MY FRIEND

Although God reassured me as I started out, it did not mean that it would be an easy ride. I waited for God to place the knowledge of journalism directly into my head, but it never happened. I still had to learn the hard way. I struggled to catch up with my classmates who were either journalism undergraduate majors or had worked in the field. I had thought that my undergraduate

degree in English was closely related, but it turned out that the rules of journalism were different in many ways.

In class, I was constantly lost, not understanding the terms used. The most I could do was to pretend I knew what everyone was talking about. I cringed when my articles returned all marked up in red, and I struggled with accepting the critical edits of my professors and classmates. It was disheartening because I felt so inadequate that it seemed impossible to catch up with others.

At the same time, I struggled with finding a part-time job. Every month, I worried that I would not be able to pay the rent. I scrimped on everything I could, but things were still very tight. I prayed for God’s help but became resentful that He did not help me find a way to provide for my basic necessities. When I was considering to attend graduate school, I had thought of working for a few years first to earn money. In the end, I directly went on to pursue my studies, because it was clear that God was leading me down this path.

My complaints echoed those of the Israelites in the wilderness. I could not understand why He asked me to



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leave my familiar surroundings and took me to a place without bread and water. Just as the Israelites had seen God's miracles in Egypt, I had clear signs from Him that graduate school was the right choice. But now that I was here, where was God? I felt as if He had left me to fend for myself.

I was tired of the rejections and roadblocks when hunting down stories and interviews, a part of journalism that I had been unprepared for. Especially since I was new to the city, I did not have connections or referrals. My classmates were not friendly or helpful. I often felt that I was at the mercy of strangers and that the strangers around me were not that merciful. This profession required one to have a very tough skin, and I didn't have it.

This feeling gradually built up. One day, I was supposed to interview a police officer. But I did not feel like leaving the house. I was in the midst of a writing-intensive semester, with an average of four articles due each week. I was weary from the constant stress of article deadlines. I knelt down to pray and decided that I would not get up until I felt peaceful. In the back of my mind, I thought: "if it takes all day, then, oh well, I don't feel up to doing the interview anyway."

As I knelt, I poured out my heart to God. In the midst of this, I felt God speak to me through a thought that came very clearly to me: "The police officer will be your friend." I was surprised. How could this stranger possibly be my friend? As I pondered what that meant, I realized that although I did not have connections to people in the area, God was my connection. The people I thought I had chanced upon were placed there by God's arrangement. I recalled the time I had walked into an independent art gallery and

felt very timid as the elderly owner snapped impatiently at me. I was just about to give up and leave when one of his volunteers appeared. He treated me with extreme kindness, willingly looking up the history and pricing of various art pieces so I could have enough information to write an article. He said he volunteered only certain hours on certain days. But it was not until that moment in prayer that I understood that the timing was not a coincidence. I also recalled how I had first met this police officer I was to interview. Without getting his contact information when I was working at the polls as a translator, I would have had to make cold calls to police stations and would have received more rejections. Therefore, if God said that this person would be my friend, then I believed Him. Strengthened, I got up and left the house for the interview.

God was indeed faithful. The police officer was not only an easy person to interview but also gave me a police officer pin and a tour of the police department, introducing me to his chief and colleagues. Afterward, he drove me to the supermarket and introduced me to his wife so that I could interview her as well. Through his introductions, I could get the three voices required for an article although I had not specifically requested them. While speaking with his wife, he bought me a bagel. And afterward, since it was raining, he and his wife drove me home instead of dropping me off at the subway. I felt that his kindness was completely uncharacteristic of the people I had met, and I could explain it in no other way than the mercy of God.

LOOKING BACK

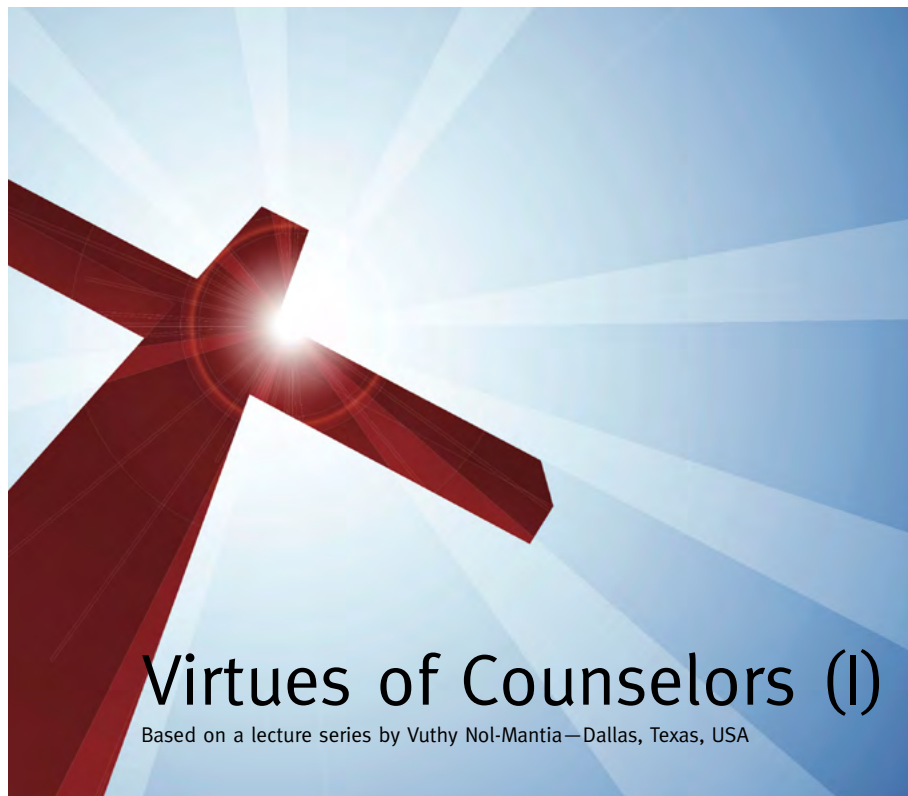
When I think back on my graduate school experience, this verse reverberates in my mind:

Go and cry in the hearing of Jerusalem, saying, 'Thus says the LORD: "I remember you, The kindness of your youth, The love of your betrothal, When you went after Me in the wilderness, In a land not sown."

(Jer 2:2)

I came across this verse while reading the Bible at home one day. It brought me to tears because God wanted me to know that though I felt that He was so far away, He did remember me. Though I was struggling in those years of graduate studies, my previous servitude and passion for Him had not been in vain, for He remembered them, and treasured them. During a spiritual convocation a few days afterward, during one prayer, I felt God tenderly saying repeatedly, "I remember you," and I felt His presence all around me. My heart was full. I was touched by the fact that God wanted to comfort me, and knew it was true that He never forgot me.

God resolved my financial stress when my academic advisor asked me to be a teaching assistant for one of his undergraduate classes and when a church family asked me to babysit. I enjoyed both jobs immensely and learned a lot from them. As I adjusted to the specific demands of journalism school, I was able to appreciate and make the most of that special time in my life as a graduate student. Although answers did not come immediately, I see God's thoughtfulness in the way He provided for me in the end. So in times when we feel weak, let us hold fast to the belief that though the way we walk is not smooth, it is paved with the love of God, which remains steadfast at all times. ★



INTRODUCTION

Christian counseling is very different from secular counseling because it views counseling through the eyes of God. Its goal is also different. It is “to turn people from darkness to light, from the hand of Satan to the hand of God, and from sin to the forgiveness of sin” (Acts 26:18). As counselors, we need to bring our brethren back to the light, and that light is our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Jesus, they are able to know and see themselves clearly.

To achieve this goal, we have to first focus on ourselves to ensure we have virtues that can counsel and bring our brothers and sisters back to God.

VIRTUES OF COUNSELORS

Have the Image and the Likeness of Jesus

The first virtue is to be filled with the image and the likeness of Jesus, because He is the best Counselor. Although we perform the counseling work, it is our Lord Jesus who heals our brothers and sisters. They may be weak in faith and cannot see Jesus. Therefore, we have to be filled with

the image and likeness of Jesus so that our counselees can see Jesus in us. If we are not close to God, we cannot possibly help those who are far away from God.

Many of us know the triangle theory: God is at the top, and the counselors and counselees are on opposite sides. Secular counseling focuses on two parties: the counselors and counselees, but this type of counseling is often unsuccessful. As men, we cannot even help ourselves, how can we help others? However, if the counselor turns to God first and builds a great relationship with Him, he will have the image and likeness of Jesus, which will make him a good counselor.

Have a Close Relationship with God

Next, we focus on our relationship with God. A great relationship with God is the foundation of good counseling; only God knows exactly what people need.

Quite often, our counselees will not show their innermost feelings. We need to be spiritually filled to be able to “see” what is in their hearts and to know what to say. For example, when a young child says,

“I’m bored,” buying him more toys or involving him in more activities will not solve the problem. When he says, “I’m bored,” it means that he feels empty. Perhaps we have not given him enough attention; perhaps we have not shown him enough love; but this child can only express his feelings by saying, “I’m bored.”

Although we may have the gift to talk and listen to people, we cannot exclude God from the picture. In most cases, our counselees’ problems are very different from those of the people in the world. We need to draw near to God and ask for His wisdom to counsel our brethren.

Secular knowledge may sound professional, but it cannot help our counselees because their problems are usually spiritual in nature. In Ezekiel 37, God brought Prophet Ezekiel to a valley of dry bones. These dry bones represent the whole house of Israel. The dryness shows their loss of hope (cf. Ezek 37:11). Israel felt this way because they had committed a great sin against God. God was no longer with them; they felt lifeless because they had no hope. In most cases, our counselees feel hopeless when they come to seek help. God is no longer



in their lives, or if He is, it is not to the full potential.

God asked Ezekiel to prophesy to the dry bones. Surely, Ezekiel would need to have faith for this task. It is the same with us. When we talk to our brothers and sisters, their situation could be so difficult that it seems impossible to help them. However, if we have a close relationship with God, we will never give up on them. When Ezekiel prophesied to the dry bones, they showed a sign of life. However, they were not yet alive. God then asked Ezekiel to prophesy to the four winds. Subsequently, breath entered these dry bones, and they became a great army of God. This shows that we need to rely fully on God to become good counselors and to help our brothers and sisters resolve their spiritual problems.

We also need to draw close to God to avoid being deceived by Satan and be weakened in our own faith. If we are weak, we may harm, instead of help, our counselees. In our lives, there are only two ways open to us. We can choose to be close to God or to be close to Satan. Quite often, the counselees who seek help live closer to Satan than to God, not because they are bad brethren, but because Satan has deceived them and weakened their faith. So in order not to fall into the same trap and to be able to help others, we have to draw close to God.

Know Our Weapons

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.

(2 Cor 10:3–6)

Although we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, because Satan, our enemy, is spirit. If

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we want to fight against Satan, we must use spiritual weapons.

At times, when we talk to our brothers and sisters, they seem to be people with common problems. But when we talk to them about their problems, we must look at them with the eyes of God. In fact, our brethren's problems seldom pertain to the physical world but to the spiritual realm, for Satan wants to destroy them. He knows that his days are numbered and that God will soon cast him into the lake of fire. His targets are those who belong to God, that is, you and me.

Let us learn from the sixty valiant men who were experts in warfare:

Behold, it is Solomon's couch, with sixty valiant men around it, of the valiant of Israel. They all hold swords, being expert in war. Every man has his sword on his thigh because of fear in the night.

(Song 3:7–8)

Although these were valiant men, they were very fearful. Yet they were prepared. They had swords on their thighs because it is easier and quicker to draw a sword from the thigh. These sixty valiant men knew their enemy. They knew their goal was to protect Solomon's carriage. They also knew their weapon, the sword on their thighs.

It is the same with us. If we encounter Satan, we will be very frightened. But being afraid does not mean we are cowards, rather, being afraid alerts us that the enemy is near. If we do not know our enemy, our goal, and our weapons, Satan can easily deceive us when we counsel a person. So what are our weapons?

THE WORD OF GOD

When our brothers and sisters undergo trials and tribulations, we

often just need to stretch out our hands and pull them up. But, to do this well, we must be close to God; we must know God's word and be filled with the Spirit of God. Otherwise, Satan will destroy us.

Only the word of God can sanctify us (Jn 17:17) and separate us from the people of the world. If we talk and walk like Jesus, we would do exactly the same thing when we counsel our brothers and sisters. No matter how eloquent or knowledgeable we are, we should remember that only the word of God can pierce a man's heart and uplift his soul.

Sometimes when we talk to people, we only tell them what they want to hear. Maybe, for that moment, they feel really good about themselves, but in the end, their life will not be saved. We may find it difficult to decide whether we should say things that make others feel good or whether we should tell them the truth. The truth can hurt. Yet it only hurts for a moment. In contrast, things that are not truthful may make a person feel good for a moment but may result in sufferings in the long run.

Think of Peter counseling Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:18–24). Can you imagine what would have happened if Peter had not rebuked Simon? Maybe Simon would have continued to think it was acceptable to use money to purchase the gift of the Holy Spirit. Maybe he would have brought many more to believe in Jesus but imparted the wrong concept to them. The incident shows that we must counsel others with the truth, the word of God.

We also need to know the word of God to overcome Satan. When Satan tempted our Lord Jesus, Jesus used the word of God to overcome these temptations. Such is the power of God's word, but we need faith to practice it. As a good counselor, we



have to put on the whole armor of God, which is God's word.

Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;
(Eph 6:14–17)

This passage mentions six pieces of spiritual equipment, most of which are related to the word of God. We know that the belt of truth and the shoes of the gospel of peace refer to God's word. The breastplate of righteousness tells us that we need to become righteous by being sanctified through God's word. But how can we put on the shield of faith? Romans chapter 10 says that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. So if we want to put on the shield of faith, we need to know the word of God. From our feet all the way to our head, we need to be filled with the word of God. Thus equipped, Satan cannot deceive us, for the word of God is God Himself (Jn 1:1).

THE SPIRIT OF GOD

Although knowing God's word is critical, we also need the spirit of God to guide us. If we read the Bible but do not pray, we will not know how to use the word of God correctly, and in the process, we will hurt ourselves and our counselees. That is why the whole armour depicted in Ephesians chapter 6 ends with: "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph 6:17).

If we have received counseling before, we may have experienced how some counselors are filled with the spirit and word of God. Their words seem to be as smooth as butter and can reach the deepest part of our soul. We can feel that they know how to counsel a person. They may not be eloquent, but the spirit and word of God dwell in them, just as they dwell in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Although the Bible describes Jesus as unattractive (Isa 53:2), many people followed Him; even the soldiers whom the high priest sent to arrest Him returned empty-handed. When questioned by the high priest why they did not arrest Jesus, they said, "We never heard a man speak like Him." Jesus' words were powerful because He was filled with God's spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the master of the sword. If we are not filled with God's spirit, we cannot be masters of the sword. Only God's spirit can make the word of God come alive to pierce men's hearts (cf. Ezek 37:9).

When Ezekiel spoke the word of God to the dead bones, the bones came together, their sinews and flesh formed, and skin covered them. But there was no life in them (Ezek 37:7–8). Only the spirit of God could revive them. The minute we speak the word of God to those who are spiritually dead, there is hope. Once there is hope, we can pray that the spirit of God may give them life. Therefore, God told Ezekiel:

Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, "Thus says the Lord GOD: 'Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.'" (Ezek 37:9)

The word and the spirit of God go hand in hand. This is comparable to

burning a piece of wood. Wood will not burn by itself. There needs to be fire. So if we want to revive someone spiritually, we need to know the word of God and be filled with the spirit of God.

Being filled with the spirit of God is important because only He is able to search the depth of God:

But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what 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)

Filled with God's spirit, the words we speak will be according to His will.

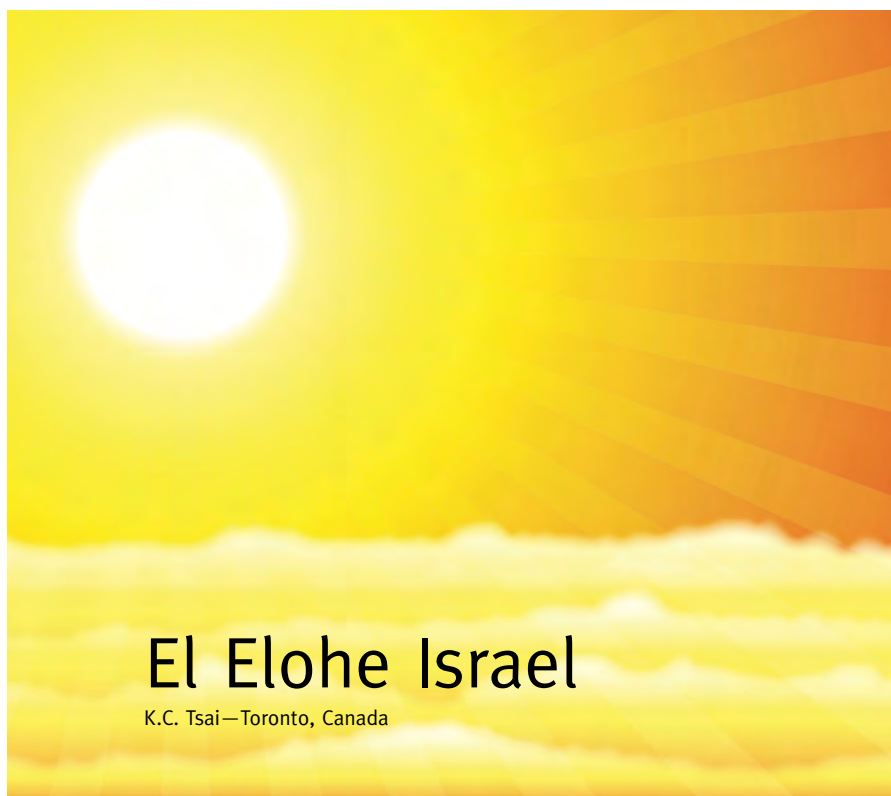
Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. (1 Cor 2:12)

Instead of seeking help from those who do not have the spirit of God or from self-help books, we need to first and foremost rely on the Holy Spirit to counsel our brethren and to lead them from spiritual darkness into the light of God. ★

[To be continued]

Next: Be Filled with the Love of God

No matter how eloquent or knowledgeable we are, we should remember that only the word of God can pierce a man's heart and uplift his soul.



El Elohe Israel

K.C. Tsai—Toronto, Canada

When Lazarus was ill, his sisters sent for the Lord Jesus, saying, “He whom You love is sick.” This simple message did not mention Lazarus’ name or ask for healing. Why? Because Lazarus’ sisters were certain that the Lord Jesus would know those whom He loved (Jn 11:5) and that He would show His love to them.

Likewise, when we come before the Lord, it is as simple as this: let the word of God work in us and shape us to become a person loved by Him. As long as we are His beloved, we can entrust ourselves to Him and allow Him to love us according to His will. It is through the ordinary events in our lives that we behold God’s countenance (Ps 42:5) and feel His love for us. It is in this way that we learn how to love Him and be His beloved people.

In Malachi 1:2–3, God said, “Was not Esau Jacob’s brother? ... Yet Jacob I have loved; but Esau I have hated.” God loved Jacob! His words were sure and right! What Jacob had wanted were the blessings that came with the birthright. However, besides these blessings, he received God’s love: Jacob’s simple resolution

to supplant the firstborn won him God’s favor, which would change his life forever.

When Esau and Jacob were born, Abraham was 160 years old. Abraham lived to the age of 175 and died when his two grandsons were fifteen years old. Fifteen years would have sufficed for Esau and Jacob to know the covenant and relationship between God and their grandfather. Fifteen years was also long enough for them to understand why their grandfather had sent his eldest son, Ishmael, away (Gen 21:14) and dispatched his six other sons to the country of the east, away from Isaac (Gen 25:6). Abraham had done all this for the sake of preserving God’s covenant and blessings for his “only son” Isaac (Gen 22:2) and to prevent any dispute over the division of the inheritance. This inheritance was extremely precious because God had promised Abraham and his descendants everlasting possession of the land and that He would be their God (Gen 17:8).

Since Jacob was born after Esau, Jacob knew there was a possibility that he might be sent away and be separated from God’s covenant and

promise, like his uncles. Although unsure of the consequences of being a second child, he yearned to become the firstborn. He knew that his father and grandfather believed in the one and only God in an otherwise polytheistic world. They had had numerous encounters with this God and were greatly blessed. He wanted to have a part of this blessing and to be connected with this God. It was this dream that changed his life.

After Isaac had blessed Jacob, Esau returned from hunting and approached Isaac with the savory food that he had prepared in order to receive his father’s blessings. When Isaac realized that the person whom he had blessed earlier was not Esau, he trembled at his grave mistake. However, when Esau wept bitterly and revealed to Isaac that his birthright had been lost through a deal made with his brother (Gen 27:36), Isaac knew he had made no mistake. His older son had not valued the honor of being the firstborn. Hence, when he blessed Jacob for the second time, before Jacob’s departure for Haran, he willingly gave him “the blessing of Abraham”



and “the land ... which God gave to Abraham” (Gen 28:4). Thus, Isaac recognized Jacob as his firstborn.

After Jacob had departed from his father's house, God appeared to him in a dream saying, “I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac,” referring to Himself as the God whom Abraham and Isaac had known, experienced, and served diligently with faith in various places and under various circumstances. There is a hint of yearning in God's declaration: although He did not expressly say it, God also wanted to be the God of Jacob. He wanted to be Jacob's. God promised to be with him wherever he went, just as He had been with Jacob's father and grandfather. God would be Jacob's inheritance and wished for Jacob to be His special possession (Deut 32:9). Similarly, God was the inheritance of the Levites who were set apart for Him. The Bible describes that the Levites had no material inheritance, unlike their brothers of the other tribes. Instead, they had God—the ultimate inheritance (Num 18:20; Deut 18:1–2). Today, true believers are likened to the Levites, set apart for God. The Lord wants us to look forward to no other goodness, apart from Him (Ps 16:2). The Lord is our inheritance, just as He would be Jacob's.

Awakened from his dream, Jacob made a vow to God: “If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God” (Gen 28:20–21). Jacob's last phrase “then the LORD shall be my God,” reveals that he had yet to treat God as his own God. He thought he could negotiate with God.

Twenty years later, Jacob fled from his uncle's place with all his possessions (Gen 31:20). He crossed the river, and headed toward the mountains of Gilead en route to his father's home. When Laban overtook him in the mountains of Gilead after a seven day pursuit, Jacob told his uncle:

Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God has seen my affliction and the labor of my hands, and rebuked you last night. (Gen 31:42)

Throughout the twenty years that Jacob stayed with Laban at Padan Aram, God was always with him (Gen 31:5). Even Laban could attest to this (Gen 30:27). However, from his conversation with Laban, we can see that, in his heart, God was still the God whom his father feared, the God of Abraham (Gen 31:42). Even though God had always been by his side during those twenty years away from home, he still saw God as the God of his father and grandfather but not his own.

It was only when Jacob arrived at the ford of Jabbok (Gen 32:22) and wrestled with God that he truly met God face to face. When the Lord saw that He did not prevail against Jacob, He touched and disjointed the socket of his hip. God said to him, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob (supplanter), but Israel (Prince of God, or “one who wrestles with God”), for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed.”

How did Jacob prevail over God? Did Jacob not suffer a hip injury that left him crippled? Wouldn't that be considered a defeat? No, Jacob did not prevail over God. Or did Jacob prevail over Esau? Did he not flee to Padan Aram, haunted by fear that Esau wanted to kill him? No, Jacob did not prevail over Esau. In a physical sense, he did not prevail at all.

But if we go beyond the ordinary to look at Jacob's life journey, he did prevail. He prevailed over his mother's heart, for she willingly helped him receive the blessing of the firstborn. He prevailed over his father's heart, for Isaac willingly blessed him with the blessing of Abraham from God (Gen 28:3–4). He had also won over God's heart, for God gave him all that He had promised Abraham and Isaac (Gen 35:11–12).

Yes, Jacob received all these because he had resolved not to give up on himself. He was born a second child, taking hold of his brother's heel. As a second child, he was unsure if he would end up like his uncles, excluded from the blessing Abraham had received from God and from inheriting the land God had promised. However, being a second child was not his own choice. He struggled and grasped any opportunity to prevent the blessing of Abraham from passing him by. Eventually, God granted him the birthright (Ex 4:22). This was what his name Jacob meant: heel catcher, or supplanter. He grabbed the birthright and supplanted the firstborn.

As the sun rose and Jacob limped across Peniel—“the face of God”—he saw why he could safely pass through his tumultuous life: it was not his own strong will to supplant or grab, but it was the mercy of the Lord who had been silently accompanying him. Now, he was to meet his brother who had been a primary threat to his life. At this crucial moment, when the strength of his legs was most needed, he limped. Nevertheless, now being Israel, the prince of God, he knew he had nothing to fear and none other than his God to lean on. Jacob had

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finally learned to let go and to look no further. God purposely took away the strength in his legs. Now, God would carry him wherever He wanted.

When he returned to Canaan, Jacob erected an altar and called it "El Elohe Israel," which means "God, the God of Israel" (Gen 33:20). God had become his own God! The Lord was no longer his grandfather's or father's God, but his. He is the God who led Jacob to personally discover, encounter, and acknowledge Him in his life.

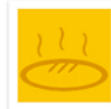
I too want God to be mine. I too want to be one whom He loves. ★

Five Loaves and Two Fish

HOME ABOUT ARCHIVES CONTRIBUTE CONTACT

The Works of the Evil Spirits (1)

1 Reply



In any warfare, it is virtually impossible to fight against an unknown and unidentified enemy. It is a war without a sense of direction. At the same time, this poses a grave danger to the lives of the soldiers involved. Every move that is made could be met with a fatal counterattack from the enemy. In such a situation, the mounting fear would destroy the courage needed to fight on till the end. Is there a chance at all for this kind of battle to be won? Needless to say, this battle has one probable and predictable outcome—it is as good as lost even before it begins.

Likewise, Paul tells us that we are battling not against flesh and blood; we are up against the spiritual hosts of wickedness (Eph. 6:12). The fight is made all the more difficult because the enemy is invisible. How are we going to fight? Thankfully, we do not fight by ourselves. We battle against the foes in the air through our faith in Jesus. The word of God, much like a pair of combat night-vision goggles, enables us to locate the whereabouts of our enemies of darkness. If the word of God is firmly upheld in our hearts, our spiritual eyesight will be brightened up to see our enemy's every move. [Continue reading →](#)

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This entry was posted in [Bible & Truth](#), [Bible Study](#) and tagged [demon possession](#), [discernment](#), [spiritual battle](#) on [June 3, 2014](#) by [Jachin](#).

Facing Job Challenges and Inner Fears

Leave a reply

"This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil." (Heb 6:19)



Lately it has become normal for me to deal with the challenge of facing new duties and new technology at work. Learning new skills, finding solutions, and meeting deadlines have become endless battles. However, any worthwhile endeavor involves risk and effort. The possibility of failure is always present. Stress and fear can come upon us like sailing through the turbulent sea amidst a storm.

God knows all our inner fears, including fears that are unknown to us. [Continue reading →](#)

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CALENDAR

June 2014						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
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Five Loaves and Two Fish

is the True Jesus Church weblog where you can share God-given inspirations and reflections with others for mutual edification and God's glory.

Let the blessings of God flow through you to our site visitors so they can be encouraged to draw closer to God.

Don't hesitate to offer your loaves and fish to the Lord today.

Visit <http://blog.tjc.org> and start reading and contributing!

Manna is looking for certain types of articles, or article genres. Each genre constitutes a different subject matter and writing approach. If you are planning to write an article (regardless of topic), please try to adhere to one of the genres below.

Christian Living

A Christian Living article gives practical biblical guidance on real-life issues and how to use Jesus' teachings in our daily lives.
Article length: 1500-2000 words.

Bible Study

A Bible Study explores a passage or character from the Bible and draws out the teachings for readers to apply to their lives.
Article length: 2000 words.

Doctrinal Study

A Doctrinal Study examines an aspect of True Jesus Church beliefs and may present it in comparison to other beliefs.
Article length: 2000 words.

Exhortation

An Exhortation encourages and admonishes the reader in different aspects of the Christian faith.
Article length: 1500-2000 words.

Testimony

A Testimony recounts an experience in the Lord that will encourage and edify the reader.
Article length: 1000-1500 words.

Creative Writing

Creative Writing pieces include poems, parables, or short stories that illustrate a biblical teaching or idea. Keep in mind as you're writing: how will this edify the reader?

SUBMISSION INFORMATION

Please email electronic files of articles (Microsoft Word) to manna@tjc.org.

Please direct any questions to manna@tjc.org or Fax: +1-562-402-3190

In your submission, please include your name, mailing address, email address, and telephone number even if you wish to remain anonymous.

CALL FOR ARTICLES

Author Guidelines and Editorial Calendar

Issue #74:

Topic: Standing Firm

Articles due: August 15, 2014

For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day. (2 Tim 1:12)

Despite his sufferings, Paul was steadfast in his faith because he knew whom he had believed. What about us today? When faced with life's difficulties, can we remain resolute in our faith? We need to reflect and ask whether we can stand firm in faith and rely on God in all things.

Moreover, as the world constantly bombards us with secular views and trends, can we stand firm? The world's influence can be so subtle that our thinking and ways of life are secularized before we even know it. Never underestimate its tenacity. Many have fallen and succumbed to its pull. If we cannot live a life which is different from the people of the world, we cannot preach the gospel that calls men out of this world into Christ's kingdom.

A more pressing danger facing end-time believers is the distortion of God's word. Is this teaching really according to the Bible? Do we know the "pattern of sound words" that Apostle Paul instructs Timothy to hold fast (2 Tim 1:13)? Can we uphold and defend the truth which is entrusted to us? These are questions that every faithful Christian needs to introspect, if he wants to stand firm in his faith.

With so many challenges to our faith, how can we persist and be unshaken in the truth? How can we resist the tide of the world? What's the secret to a firm faith and trust in God, even in times of sickness, suffering, trials, and tribulations?

In your submission, please include your name, mailing address, email address, and telephone number.

GENERAL WRITING GUIDELINES

CONTENT

- Content should be biblically sound and adhere to biblical principles.
- Article should be organized and have a logical flow of thought.
- The main point or teaching of the article should be clear to the reader.
- Readers should be able to apply what they have read to their daily lives.

GRAMMAR/STYLE

- Use active instead of passive voice.
- Write concisely.
- Use concrete words and ideas instead of abstract concepts.
- Use "plain old English" instead of obscure, academic language.
- Use the NKJV version when quoting Bible verses.
- Use American spelling, if possible.
- Adhere to the IA Style Guide in its latest edition.

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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<http://www.tjc.org>

Call for Devotionals

“I will meditate on Your precepts, And contemplate Your ways.” (Ps 119:15)

Most of us regularly read the Bible and ponder upon God’s word and His works. However, not many of us may take time to actually pen down our thoughts. But if you do, you may actually be writing a devotional.

A devotional is a pithy article (300 to 350 words) inspired by biblical teachings.

Has a verse recently caught your attention, giving you insight on God’s love and a Christian’s relationship with Him?

Write it down and share this spiritual nourishment!

If you wish to read recent and archived devotionals written by our church members, go to www.tjc.org and members.tjc.org.

To submit your devotional, please indicate “Devotional” in the subject line and send it to manna@tjc.org.



ENGLISH WRITERS RETREAT 2014

*But it is good for me to draw near to God;
I have put my trust in the Lord God,
That I may declare all Your works.
(Psalms 73:28)*

In Hebrew, “to write” can be translated as “to declare” like the verse above. At English Writers Retreat, you don’t need to worry about writing from your own resources. Instead, it’s the perfect environment for you to simply draw near to God and reflect on all His wonderful works.

What better way is there to share what you have learned and experienced from God than to pen it down timelessly? Take hold of this opportunity not only for your own edification, but also to declare His works to others.

Date: **Aug 3 - 9, 2014**

Location: **Edmonton Church, Alberta, Canada**

Register at: **events.tjc.org**

Register by: **June 30, 2014**

