

January to March 2015

“Making Better Choices in Life”

by
Rev Hien Nguyen

About the Author



Rev Hien Nguyen is Pastor of Brisbane Bible-Presbyterian Church (Australia) since its inception in August 2006. He received his Master of Divinity (2003) and Master of Theology (2004) degrees from the Far Eastern Bible College (Singapore).

THURSDAY, JANUARY 1

MARK 7:1-23

JEREMIAH 17:9

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked..."

BETTER TO HAVE A NEW HEART (1)

Today is New Year's Day. People usually love to have new things and expect new things for the New Year. What about you? The most important thing that many may ignore is a new heart or a new nature that Jesus Christ can give to them. *"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature"* (2 Cor 5:17). Why do we need a new heart? It is because we have a totally depraved, corrupt, sinful and rebellious nature.

A deceitful, proud and wicked heart: Many deceive themselves (or are being deceived by others) by thinking that there is still something good in human nature and that they can improve themselves to be better. Thus, they think that they do not need Jesus Christ to save them and to transform their lives. God's Word exposes the true heart and nature of human beings: *"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"* (Jer 17:9). *"For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness"* (Mark 7:21-22). Due to our sinful and deceitful nature, *"It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man"* (Ps 118:8) and to trust in God's Word, the Holy Scriptures, than human words, philosophies, theories, mindsets and arguments!

A Hardened Heart: Many do not want God nor listen to His Word. *"For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them"* (Acts 28:27). *"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables"* (2 Tim 4:3-4)! What about us?

THOUGHT: The human heart is totally depraved, corrupt and sinful.

PRAYER: O Lord, please save me and give me a new heart.

BETTER TO HAVE A NEW HEART (2)

A rebellious heart: The human heart is not only deceitful, sinful and hardened toward God and His Word but also rebellious and bears enmity against God and His Word. *“But this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart...”* (Jer 5:23). *“Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be”* (Rom 8:7). We must not be surprised when we suffer opposition or persecutions from unbelievers or “professing” Christians as Jesus says, *“The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also”* (John 15:20).

A totally depraved heart: The human heart is sinful, hardened and rebellious. People can never change or improve it or make it better. Not by any means. Not even education, discipline, abstinence, asceticism, religious rituals and practices, or by restraining themselves in the temples or monasteries far away from civilisation can change its nature. They may try to stop their sinful acts and deeds, but they can never stop the sinful lusts, pride, envy, hatred, or covetousness in their hearts. God’s Word confirms, *“Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil”* (Jer 13:23). Sadly, many deceive themselves (or are deceived by worldly philosophies and Satan) by thinking that they can save and improve themselves and that there are many ways for men to get into heaven. So they compromise and promote the ecumenical mindset and movement for the sake of love, unity and harmony!

However, God’s Word confirms that there is only one way for men to God and to Heaven, and that way is the Lord Jesus Himself, who says, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”* (John 14:6).

THOUGHT: Salvation is from the Lord Jesus alone (Acts 4:12).

PRAYER: Lord, help me to trust in Thee alone for my salvation.

BETTER TO HAVE A NEW HEART (3)

The people of Israel, even God's chosen people, had special privileges compared to other nations. They had God's special revelation through His Word and law, His guidance, His mighty works and deliverance, and His prophets' teachings and warnings. But they sinned, transgressed God's commandments, rebelled against Him, and turned to idolatry. They profaned God's holy name through their sinful and ungodly life even when they were chastised and taken into captivity to Babylon. God graciously used His servant Ezekiel to reveal to them His gracious work of granting them a new heart and new spirit, *"Thus saith the Lord GOD; I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went. And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the LORD, saith the Lord GOD, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes... A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh"* (Ezek 36:22-23, 26).

After a serious collision, the cars were so damaged that they were beyond repair. The insurance companies did not repair the cars but gave their clients new cars. God does not improve our sinful heart to make it better because it is too sinful and depraved to be "repaired." God has to grant us a new heart. Thank God for the Lord Jesus's atoning death and resurrection and for the Holy Spirit's gracious work through His Word that we can be created new in Christ. *"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature"* (Gal 6:15). Knowing this truth, we must not compromise as we can only find true love, true unity, true blessed worship and fellowship, and true blessed marriage among God's people who have been saved and transformed by His grace and Word.

THOUGHT: Only God the Creator can give me a new heart.

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee so much for Thy good work in me.

BETTER TO HAVE A NEW HEART (4)

You may have a new suit, a new gadget, a new car, a new house, or even the whole world with wealth, power and fame. But if you do not have a new heart in Christ, you will have great regret and misery before the holy and righteous God on the Judgment Day. It is better to have a new heart than anything else in the world. We must make sure that we are saved and born again, *"not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God"* (John 1:13). A believer is born again not of his Christian parents (*"not of blood"*), nor of his own determination, discipline, training and effort (not *"of the will of the flesh"*), nor *"of the will of man,"* even of parents and pastors, *"but of God"* alone. This truth will turn us to the Lord alone and we will humbly commit ourselves to Him with trust and submission as clay in the divine potter's hand so that we can enjoy God's good work in us each day until we are perfect when Jesus comes (Phil 1:6). This truth also reminds parents and pastors to pray hard for their children and church members as only God is able to transform their hearts and lives, and they must give all glory, thanks and praise to God alone for lives transformed by God's gracious work.

When we are born again by the Holy Spirit and by God's Word (John 3:5; 1 Pet 1:23), we shall be *"partakers of the divine nature"* (2 Pet 1:4) and be God's children and sheep. A goat or wolf cannot transform itself to be a sheep even though it may be in *"sheep's clothing."* Sooner or later its nature will be exposed as its nature is different from that of a sheep. Many churches are proud of their big membership, but the most important thing before God is whether they are truly His sheep who only hear the Shepherd's voice (the Holy Scriptures) and follow Him. *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me"* (John 10:27). With a new heart and nature, we will hear God's Word alone and follow our Saviour Jesus Christ alone with trust and submission. Those who doubt, question or criticise God's Word do not have the nature of the Lord's sheep!

THOUGHT: Better to have a new heart than anything else!

PRAYER: Lord, please continue Thy good work in me each day.

BETTER TO SEEK GOD FIRST (1)

“What are you looking for in life?” The answer to this question will be different depending on one’s needs. “I am looking for a job or a more suitable job,” or “I am looking for a life partner,” or “I am looking for a place to stay,” or “I am not looking for anything.” Many may not reveal their selfish ambitions or motives. But when we pay close attention to what they want, say, desire or do, we can see some spending their time and energy seeking after money, fame, popularity, wealth, position or power. Some may seek after worldly pleasures and entertainments, and others after nice food and clothing. Some may seek after health foods for their health, and others after the truth and true happiness in life through religions or worldly philosophies. But outside of Jesus Christ and God’s Word, no man can find the truth about God, man, true happiness and true salvation. Sadly, not many are truly seeking after God and His Truth through His Word. Even many so-called “Christians” today are seeking after material blessings like those in Jesus’ days: *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled”* (John 6:26).

What about us? Who or what are you seeking after? Today, Jesus is still asking, *“What seek ye?”* (John 1:38). Is it the Lord Himself and His Word? Sadly, many will seek God only after they experience failures, hopelessness or helplessness in their troubles, problems, dangers, illness or trials. However, it is always wiser and better to seek God first in all things. When we truly acknowledge and believe that only God the Creator, who has created us, saved us, given us a new heart, and is transforming our lives each day to the image of His Son Jesus Christ *“in righteousness and true holiness”* (Eph 4:24), we will seek God first each day and in all things. Are we truly seeking God and His Word first?

THOUGHT: To seek God and His Word first is the wisest!

PRAYER: Lord, help me to wisely seek Thee and Thy Word first.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 6

MATTHEW 6:19-34

MATTHEW 6:33

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness...”

BETTER TO SEEK GOD FIRST (2)

It is better for us to seek God first because it is God’s command: “*But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you*” (Matt 6:33), “*Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near*” (Isa 55:6), and “*For thus saith the LORD ... Seek ye me, and ye shall live*” (Amos 5:4). The living and true God, the Creator, has commanded us to seek Him first and His kingdom and His righteousness in Christ Jesus so that we can be blessed. If we fail to seek God first, we fail to obey His commandment, and it is a sin! It is also a curse for those who fail to seek God first (2 Chron 12:14; Ps 10:4; Isa 31:1).

It is better for you to seek God first because He is the Giver of life and all blessings. It is foolish to seek after a person who is unable to help, bless and save you. Sadly, many are deceived into seeking after false gods, religious leaders, or idols that can never save them, transform their lives or bring them to Heaven. Only the living and true God of the Holy Scriptures, the Saviour Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are able to help you, save you, bless you, and transform your life. “*The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God*” (Ps 14:2). “*The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him...*” (Ezra 8:22). “*... they that seek the LORD understand all things*” (Prov 28:5). “*I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears*” (Ps 34:4). “*The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the LORD shall not want any good thing*” (Ps 34:10). “*...as long as he sought the LORD, God made him to prosper*” (2 Chron 26:5). It is always better and wiser for us to seek God first in all things. Do we do so each day?

THOUGHT: God commands me to seek Him and His Word first!

PRAYER: Lord, help me to seek Thee and Thy Word first in all things.

BETTER TO SEEK GOD FIRST (3)

Humbly and wholeheartedly seek God’s presence: Seeking God means seeking His face, His presence, His name, His will, His kingdom, His righteousness, His guidance, His strength and His approval as the Lord our God is all we need, and we must continually do so with all our hearts. “*But if from thence thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul*” (Deut 4:29; cf. Prov 7:15). “*Seek the LORD and his strength, seek his face continually*” (1 Chron 16:11; Ps 24:6; 27:8). “*But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness...*” (Matt 6:33; cf. Zeph 2:3). Are we truly and wholeheartedly seeking God and His kingdom and His righteousness in the Lord Jesus Christ?

Seek God’s Word and will: Seeking God means seeking His Word, even His revelation. Many think that they can seek God without seeking God’s Word! They are just deceiving themselves. How can we seek God without His revelation through His Word? How can we seek a person whom we have never known nor met without any information about him, without his ID, his address, his contact number, etc? We must seek God through His written Word (the Holy Scriptures) and through His living Word (the Lord Jesus Christ). “*No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him*” (John 1:18). “*...seek the law of the LORD, and to do it...*” (Ezra 7:10). “*...keep and seek for all the commandments of the LORD your God...*” (1 Chron 28:8; cf. Ps 119:45). “*Seek ye out of the book of the LORD, and read: no one of these shall fail...*” (Isa 34:16). If we fail to seek God’s Word, we shall perish. “*Salvation is far from the wicked: for they seek not thy statutes*” (Ps 119:155). Seeking God’s Word is also seeking God’s will as God has revealed His will through His Word. We must follow Jesus, who says, “*I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me*” (John 5:30).

THOUGHT: Do I seek God and His Word always with all my heart?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to seek Thee and Thy Word with all my heart.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 8

PSALM 63

PSALM 63:1

*“O God, thou art my God;
early will I seek thee...”*

BETTER TO SEEK GOD FIRST (4)

The basic signs of a born-again believer, with a new heart or nature in Christ, are to seek God and His Word, to thirst for God and His Word, and to maintain a living fellowship with Him in prayer and in meditation of His Word each day. *“As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby”* (1 Pet 2:2). *“O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is”* (Ps 63:1). If we have these basic signs, we must thank God and praise the Lord *“for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure”* (Phil 2:13).

Our Lord Jesus knows very well that we must rely on Him, trust in Him and submit to Him moment by moment for His grace and strength to bear much fruit for God’s glory. *“I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing”* (John 15:5). That is why we must seek God and His Word first to know His will, to get His direction and guidance, and to receive His strength, wisdom and grace, and peace and joy to live a victorious life and to labour for Him fruitfully. Satan also knows this truth very well, so he tries his best to distract and draw us away from the blessed fellowship with God by worldly matters and things, eg. something interesting, something nice, something or someone attractive, or even some worry, stress, laziness, complacency, pride, tiredness, illness, disappointment, criticism, misjudgment, disagreement, opposition, trouble, or trial, etc.

No matter what may happen to us, and no matter how we may feel, we must remember that God alone is our life and all we need — our strength, wisdom, victory, peace, joy, hope, and glory and also our salvation, righteousness, holiness, help and deliverance. We must therefore seek God first and always.

THOUGHT: It is better to seek God first as He is all I need.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to seek Thee first as Thou art all I need.

BETTER TO TRUST IN GOD AND RELY ON HIM (1)

Many trust in their own “gods.” Some trust in their loved ones or relatives or friends who have power and wealth on earth. Others trust in themselves and in their ability, their knowledge, their power, their own heart, their own way, and their wealth. What about us? We must thank God for revealing Himself and His Truth to us, so that we might wisely put our trust in Him and His Word alone, *“It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man”* (Ps 118:8).

People usually rely on someone or something that can help them or support them — their parents, their spouses, their relatives, their friends, their bosses, their religious leaders, their own understanding, their wealth, their means, their resources or themselves. Many others rely on something that may improve their physical health, etc. As *“the flesh is weak”* (Matt 26:41), many are disappointed by the person or thing they rely on. We must thank God, our Creator (who is all-powerful, all-knowing, all-wise, eternal, immutable, holy, loving, gracious and merciful), that when we seek Him, turn to Him, wait upon Him, trust in Him and rely on Him, we shall never be disappointed. Looking at the life and the faith of King Asa recorded in 2 Chronicles chapters 14, 15 and 16, we can see that reliance on God is wise and blessed. But reliance on man is foolish and cursed. *“Because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on the LORD thy God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of thine hand. Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubims a huge host, with very many chariots and horsemen? yet, because thou didst rely on the LORD, he delivered them into thine hand. For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. Herein thou hast done foolishly: therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars”* (2 Chron 16:7-9).

THOUGHT: Do I truly trust in God and rely on Him always?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to trust in Thee and rely on Thee always.

BETTER TO TRUST IN GOD AND RELY ON HIM (2)

Human help is vain: It is better to turn to God, trust in Him and rely on Him in all things because human help is vain. This does not mean that we proudly need no man. We wholeheartedly trust in God, who is able to use people to help us according to His will and way. But when we turn to men and rely on them, we must learn from David as he cried to the Lord, *“Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help”* (Ps 22:11) and *“Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man”* (Ps 108:12).

It is a curse to trust in man: When Israel, God’s people, turned to the heathen or unbelievers for help, they could not find help but curse: *“Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the LORD!”* (Isa 31:1). *“Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD”* (Jer 17:5).

It is a blessing to trust in God: We do not need to learn costly lessons by trusting in man, and then repent and turn to the Lord. It is always wiser and better for us to seek God and turn to Him for help first and always. *“Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit”* (Jer 17:7-8). *“For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him...”* (2 Chron 16:9). God does see and know whether our hearts are perfect toward Him, trusting Him and relying on Him alone.

THOUGHT: In whom or what does my heart trust in all things?

PRAYER: Lord, please keep me trusting in Thee and relying on Thee.

BETTER TO TRUST IN GOD AND RELY ON HIM (3)

We ought to turn to God and look up to Him, trust in Him and rely on Him because He is:

The omnipotent God: Man is bound to his weaknesses, infirmities, shortcomings and mistakes. He cannot cope with and deal with great troubles and problems, afflictions and trials, temptations and attacks from Satan. However, God is omnipotent or all-powerful. *"Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?"* (Jer 32:27). Is there anything too hard for God or impossible for God? Thank God that *"With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible"* (Matt 19:26). God is the Almighty Creator, so with Him all things are possible. When we encounter the impossibility, instead of looking up to men (God's creatures), let us turn to our Almighty Creator, look unto Him, wait upon Him, trust in Him, rely on Him, and we shall never be disappointed. *"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth"* (Ps 121:1-2).

The omniscient God: Man cannot know everything due to his limited knowledge and understanding. He does not know what may happen to him and to his family and to the world tomorrow. He does not know the best advice and solution in tough situations, difficulties and trials. But God is omniscient. He knows all things and everything well (Ps 139; John 16:30), even the end of a matter from the beginning (Isa 46:10); and His knowledge, understanding, wisdom and judgments are unsearchable (Rom 11:33-36). God knows us much better than we know ourselves. God knows our hearts, our fears, our worries, our stress, our motives, our weaknesses, our health, our works, our troubles, our future, etc. Thus, it is better for us to turn to God, look up to Him, trust in Him, and rely on Him for help and direction in all situations.

THOUGHT: It is wise to trust in the almighty and all-knowing God!

PRAYER: Lord, help me to rely on Thy power and wisdom.

MONDAY, JANUARY 12

PSALM 46

PSALM 46:1

*“God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.”*

BETTER TO TRUST IN GOD AND RELY ON HIM (4)

The omnipresent God: We cannot be present everywhere. Even if your father is a general or chief commander of the army, or a commissioner of the police department, he cannot help you when you are attacked by a gang of robbers or bandits at night at home or overseas. Your husband or wife or parent may be a famous and good medical doctor. He or she cannot help you instantly when you have a stroke or a traffic accident on the street. Thank God that God is everywhere and ready to help us and protect us in all situations. *“God is our refuge and strength, a very present (ready) help in trouble”* (Ps 46:1). Thus, it is better for us to trust in God and rely on Him in all things.

The eternal God: Man is bound to death, and he may pass away anytime, even tonight. Many worry, feel hopeless or are distressed when the person they always look to for help suddenly passes away, whether in an accident or because of illness. God, however, is eternal and ever living to help us in our time of need when we turn to Him and trust in Him. *“The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms...”* (Deut 33:27; cf. Heb 4:16). Truly, *“Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them”* (Heb 7:25).

The immutable God: Man and his words are also bound to change due to his weaknesses or to situations beyond his ability to control. Man is changeable or mutable. A person who has promised to help you tomorrow may change his mind or cancel his plan due to his sudden illness, his family, an accident or something happening to his work or position. However, God and His Word and promises are always the same yesterday, today and for ever (Ps 102:27; Mal 3:6; Heb 1:12). Truly, *“Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever”* (Heb 13:8). Thus, we will not be disappointed when we turn to God and trust in Him and His Word.

THOUGHT: Rely on the omnipresent, eternal and immutable God!

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for being a very present help in trouble.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 13

PSALM 103

PROVERBS 3:5

“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart...”

BETTER TO TRUST IN GOD AND RELY ON HIM (5)

The sovereign, supreme, and most high God: Man cannot control everything. A manager in your workplace may want to help you, but his help is vain if his big boss or CEO wants to sack you. God is the most high God, supreme and sovereign, so He is always in control and He is able to make all things including the bad things, our enemies, or our infirmities work together for our good when we turn to Him, trust in Him and submit to Him. *“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose”* (Rom 8:28). We should remember that to love God is to keep and obey His Word. *“If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him”* (John 14:23). Not keeping God’s Word or commandments is a sin, and the holy God never condones sins. We shall not enjoy God’s help and blessings if we fail to keep His Word and do His will no matter how we may trust in Him.

Gracious and merciful God: Man tends to help those who deserve his help or who please him. When we do something displeasing to our helpers, they will not want to help us any more even though we are doing God’s will and magnifying His Word. However, God is always gracious and merciful, so we can humbly turn to Him, trust in Him and cry unto Him for help although we do not deserve it at all. *“And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth”* (Exod 34:6).

As God our Creator is almighty, all-knowing, ever-present, eternal, unchangeable, sovereign, gracious and merciful, it is always better for us to seek Him and His Word first and wholeheartedly trust in Him and rely on Him no matter what may happen to us, *“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding”* (Prov 3:5).

THOUGHT: God is absolutely trustworthy and reliable!

PRAYER: Lord, help me to trust and to rely on Thee with all my heart.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 14

PHILIPPIANS 3:1-16

PHILIPPIANS 3:8

*“...for the excellency of the knowledge
of Christ Jesus my Lord...”*

BETTER TO KNOW GOD MORE AND MORE (1)

We have learnt that it is better to have a new heart or nature in the Lord Jesus Christ and be God’s children than to have the whole world. With this new heart, we will thirst for God and His Word and trust in Him and in His Word more and more. We cannot trust or commit our lives to a stranger or to a person we do not know well. The more we know a person with his godly and honest personality, character, qualities, capacity, ability, and motives, the more we can put our trust in him, and we shall naturally trust him more if he is our father or husband or brother. Thus, the more we know the living and true God our heavenly Father, God the Son our Saviour Jesus Christ, and God the Holy Spirit our Comforter and Helper, the more we will trust in Him, rely on Him and commit our lives, our studies, our marriage, our family, our work, our ministry and our future to Him. Do you see it as very vital and important to know more about God each day? Why?

God delights in our knowledge of Him: How would you feel if your husband/wife or your son/daughter does not know about you: your character and personality, your beliefs and moral standards, your capacity and wisdom, or your likes and dislikes? Surely if they know and interact lovingly with you, you would be very happy. God says that He delights in our knowledge of Him: *“Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD”* (Jer 9:23-24). Do we truly know God and desire to know more about Him? All the knowledge of this world cannot save you nor help you live a godly and happy life, except the knowledge of God and His Word. Paul regarded all things but loss *“for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord”* (Phil 3:8). What about us?

THOUGHT: The knowledge of God is the best knowledge!

PRAYER: Lord, please help me to know Thee more each day.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 15

PSALM 9

2 PETER 3:18

*“But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of
our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”*

BETTER TO KNOW GOD MORE AND MORE (2)

God commands us to know Him: Not only does God delight in our knowledge of Him and His Word, He also commands us to know Him: *“Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth”* (Ps 46:10). Many a time, we may be worried, perplexed, dismayed or afraid in our difficulties, troubles, illness, afflictions or trials. However, God commands us: *“Be still, and know that I am God.”* When we calm our troubled souls and perplexed minds, and acknowledge that our Heavenly Father is God, that our Saviour Jesus Christ is God, and that our Comforter the Holy Spirit is God, who is always sovereign, almighty, all-knowing, ever-present, gracious and caring, we can turn to Him, trust in Him and commit everything to Him to enjoy His loving care and peace. God also commands us to grow in His grace and in the knowledge of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ: *“But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen”* (2 Pet 3:18). We must know more about our Lord Jesus Christ today than yesterday, last week or last month or else we are not growing at all!

Surely, the more we know the Lord our God and His Word, the more we shall trust in Him and rely on Him. *“And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou, LORD, hast not forsaken them that seek thee”* (Ps 9:10). *“For the which cause 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 that which I have committed unto him against that day”* (2 Tim 1:12). *“And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus”* (2 Tim 3:15). What about us?

THOUGHT: The knowledge of God and His Word is vital.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be calm and know that Thou art God.

BETTER TO KNOW GOD MORE AND MORE (3)

Many think that they know God their Creator, but actually they may only have head-knowledge of Him, not heart-knowledge. They may even be pastors or bible college professors, and they may preach and teach about God and the Saviour Jesus Christ, and they may even perform miracles in Jesus' name, but they do not truly know God nor wholeheartedly believe, fear, and submit themselves to God and to the authority of God's Word! They may be famous and honoured by men, but they will be shocked and frightened when they hear Jesus' words: *“I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity”* (Matt 7:23). Only those who truly repent and receive the Lord Jesus as their Lord and Saviour with a trusting and submissive heart are truly born-again with a new heart in Christ and are able to know God with a heart-knowledge as their Heavenly Father and their Good Shepherd.

Knowing God with a father-child relationship: A person may know George Washington, the first president of the USA, and may speak about his life and career, quoting all his sayings, yet he may not be a descendant of Washington. A person may know the life and the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ and even preach and teach about Him and quote His sayings, yet he may not be God's child if he has not been born into God's family. Jesus prays to His Father, *“And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent”* (John 17:3). The verb “know” here is not just a head-knowledge but a heart-knowledge with personal experience and relationship with God. When we are born again, we have eternal life with a new heart to know God as a child knows his father. A child will naturally know and trust in his father more and more when he grows. That is the difference between Christianity and other religions. Other religions offer only some moral teachings, but without life or a personal relationship with God!

THOUGHT: I must know God as a child knows his father.

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for being my God and my Father.

BETTER TO KNOW GOD MORE AND MORE (4)

Knowing God with a shepherd-sheep relationship: The Lord Jesus says, *“And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice...I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine... And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand”* (John 10:4, 14, 28). Sheep are naïve and defenceless. They do need the guidance, loving care and protection of their shepherd. Without the shepherd, they would go astray and be easy prey for fierce beasts like wolves, lions or bears (John 10:12; 1 Sam 17:34). Sheep have a close and blessed fellowship with their shepherd. Sheep can recognise their shepherd’s voice and follow him, and not run before him. They are not familiar with a stranger’s voice and will flee from him. The shepherd’s voice is the very Word of God. Do we truly know the Lord Jesus Christ and have a close fellowship with Him as our Shepherd? Do we recognise His voice and follow after Him? Do we enjoy our Good Shepherd’s guidance, loving care, protection and comfort day by day? *“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me”* (Ps 23:1-4).

Knowing God with reverence and obedience: Many think that they know God and the Saviour Jesus Christ, and even serve God and preach the Lord and His Word, but they do not keep God’s Word nor do God’s will. They do not truly know God. *“He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him”* (1 John 2:4; cf. Titus 1:16). What about us?

THOUGHT: If I truly know God, I will fear Him and obey Him.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to truly know Thee, fear Thee and obey Thee.

BETTER TO KNOW GOD MORE AND MORE (5)

In order to know God more and more, we must highly value the knowledge of God, seek Him and His Word, pray for a better knowledge of Him, and keep His Word.

Highly value the knowledge of God: We must be willing to regard all things but loss for the high value of the knowledge of God. *"Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord..."* (Phil 3:8). If we are not willing to spend more time with God and His Word, we are depriving ourselves of an opportunity for God to reveal Himself to us.

Pray for a better knowledge of God: If God does not reveal Himself to us, we can never know Him with a heart-knowledge. Jesus says, *"no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him"* (Matt 11:27). Knowing this truth, we must humbly set aside all our pre-understanding, worldly knowledge, human arguments or prejudice, and then fervently pray *"that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him"* (Eph 1:17). Do we?

Read and keep God's Word: God has revealed Himself to mankind generally through His creation and specifically through His written Word, the Holy Scriptures, and through His living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. We cannot know God properly and correctly without His Word and without the Lord Jesus Christ. We must read and keep God's Word with a prayerful, teachable, trusting and submissive heart to receive more of His revelation, *"He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him"* (John 14: 21).

THOUGHT: Do I desire and pray for a better knowledge of God?

PRAYER: Lord, increase my understanding of Thee and Thy Word.

MONDAY, JANUARY 19

PHILIPPIANS 3:1-16

PHILIPPIANS 3:8

*“Yea doubtless, and I count
all things but loss...”*

BETTER TO REGARD ALL THINGS BUT LOSS (1)

People in this world usually do not want to give up or let go of what they regard as precious, valuable, rare, priceless, of great value, golden opportunities, noble blood or royal family. They want to pursue it and try to get it, to keep it, to protect it, and then they become proud and boast about it. However, even when they gain the whole world with all its worldly values and treasures, they cannot find peace, joy and rest for their hearts, nor can they find salvation for their souls.

If we can find something most valuable, we shall be willing to let go of other things and regard them but loss so that we can get the thing that is most valuable. If we have a big real diamond, we shall not be interested in those small and fake ones although they may also glitter. The Lord Jesus says, *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field”* (Matt 13:44).

Satan still uses worldly values and pleasures and *“all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life”* (1 John 2:16) to attract many and distract them from things that have true and eternal value. If we can find the Lord Jesus, His knowledge, His salvation, His righteousness, and His presence, we can say like Paul, *“Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death”* (Phil 3:8-10). Do we highly value and treasure the Lord Jesus above all?

THOUGHT: Who or what do I treasure most?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to know Thee and treasure Thee above all.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 20

PHILIPPIANS 3:1-16

PHILIPPIANS 3:8-9

*“...that I may win Christ,
And be found in him...”*

BETTER TO REGARD ALL THINGS BUT LOSS (2)

Paul regarded all things but loss for the more valuable knowledge of his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. What did he give up?

Noble blood: Paul was “*circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee*” (Phil 3:5). The Jews regarded themselves as the privileged people of God and despised the Gentiles. But before God, both Jews and Gentiles have sinned, and all need God’s salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone (Rom 3:23; Eph 2:8). If we think we can gain more of God’s grace or favour than others because of our nationality, our noble family, or even Christian families with Christian parents and pastors, we have fallen from God’s grace. “*...God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble*” (James 4:6). This is why Paul regarded those things but loss so that he might win Christ and His grace. What about us?

Self-righteousness: Paul regarded his own righteousness as rubbish and dung so that he might win Christ and His righteousness. He said, “*touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless... I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith*” (Phil 3:6,8-9). If we think that we are able to gain God’s grace or favour more than others because of what we have done, laboured and sacrificed, we have fallen from God’s grace and righteousness!

All things: Paul even regarded “*all things*” but loss and dung so that he “*may win Christ, And be found in him*” (Phil 3:8-9). What did Paul mean by “*all things*”? It means whatever we can list: self-righteousness, sacrifice, noble blood, fame, power, wealth, high social status, materialism, etc. What about us?

THOUGHT: Do I regard all things but loss in order to have Christ?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to regard all things but loss in order to have Thee.

BETTER TO REGARD ALL THINGS BUT LOSS (3)

Neither anyone nor anything can save us: No one, not even ourselves or anything in this whole world, can save us from sins and the condemnation of sins in the eternal Lake of Fire. *"For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?..."* (Matt 16:26). Thank God that the Lord Jesus Christ alone is able to redeem us, forgive us, and wash us with His own blood. Only He can save us and justify us. And only God's Word can inspire and strengthen our faith, regenerate us and sanctify us. Thus, it is better to regard all things but loss so that we may have Christ and God's salvation and truth. What about you?

All things will pass away: God's Word says: *"And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever"* (1 John 2:17), and *"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness"* (2 Pet 3:10-11). The world and all things in the world will pass away. Who and what will remain for ever? God, the Saviour Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and God's will and Word remain for ever. Thus, we should not be distracted or attracted by the temporal things in this world, *"for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal"* (2 Cor 4:18).

We can bring nothing with us after death: No matter how precious and valuable certain persons or things in this world are to us, we have to leave them behind when we are called home to be with the Lord. *"For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out"* (1 Tim 6:7). Thus, it is better to regard all things but loss to win Christ and to be found in Him. Do we?

THOUGHT: All my treasures in this world will pass away some day!

PRAYER: Lord, keep me from the attractions of this world.

BETTER TO FOCUS ON ETERNAL THINGS (1)

Seeing that all things in this world will pass away, it is better for us to focus on the things that will not pass away:

God's salvation in Christ: Salvation is of the Lord alone (Jon 2:9; Ps 3:8; Acts 4:12; Rev 7:10). God's salvation is an “*everlasting salvation*” (Isa 45:17; Heb 5:9). We shall not escape if “*we neglect so great salvation*” (Heb 2:3)! It is impossible for us to save ourselves (Matt 19:26), so it is better to regard all things but loss to receive God's salvation in Christ.

God's righteousness in Christ: All the good works and “*all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags*” (Isa 64:6). It is better to take off our own filthy robe of self-righteousness and put on God's new robe of Christ's righteousness, which “*endureth for ever*” (Ps 111:3).

The knowledge of Christ: All the knowledge of the world will pass away, but the knowledge of God will help us trust in Him more, fear Him more, and treasure Him more. It is better to regard all things but loss “*for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus... That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings...*” (Phil 3:8,10).

The Lord Jesus and His glory: The more we know the Lord, the more we shall appreciate Him and highly value Him above all, “*that I may win Christ*” (Phil 3:8). Step by step by God's grace we shall know that the Lord Jesus Christ is all we need — our Saviour, our Deliverer, our Redeemer, our Lord, our King, our High Priest, our Great Prophet, our Good Shepherd, our Great Physician, our Guide and Protector, our Best Friend, our Life, our Hope, our Joy, our Peace, our Strength, our Light, our Bread of Life, our Victory, our Glory, our “*wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption*” (1 Cor 1:30), and our “*all, and in all*” (Col 3:11), and we shall not want to exchange the Lord Jesus for anything else in this world (Ps 73:25).

THOUGHT: Better to have Jesus, His salvation and righteousness.

PRAYER: Lord, help me treasure Thee as my all.

BETTER TO FOCUS ON ETERNAL THINGS (2)

The more we know the Lord and His Truth, the more we will treasure Him above all. And we will be willing to regard all things but loss when we are tempted to compromise to gain worldly values, recognition, and comforts or when we are despised, hated, opposed or persecuted because of our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and God’s divinely inspired and preserved Word, which endures for ever.

God’s Word: Human words, theories, philosophies, teaching or arguments, no matter how good they appear, can never give spiritual life and will pass away. *“But the word of the Lord endureth for ever...”* (1 Pet 1:25; Isa 40:8). The Lord Jesus confirms, *“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away”* (Matt 24:35). Thus, it is better for us to treasure God’s Word, keep God’s Word, and *“live...by every word of God”* (Luke 4:4) each day .

God’s will: God’s Word reveals God’s will to us, and *“the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever”* (1 John 2:17). Whatever we have done and are doing and will do, if it is not according to God’s will and Word, it is in vain and will be in vain. Many are just wasting their time, life and resources living according to their own will, even those who claim that they are serving the Lord and doing many things in His name. If it is their own will and way, they and their sacrifices will be rejected just like Cain’s (Gen 4:5), and Jesus will profess to them, *“I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity”* (Matt 7:23). Thus, it is better to seek God’s will, know God’s will and do God’s will as the Lord Jesus did (John 6:38).

God’s love: *“God is love”* (1 John 4:8), and His love *“never faileth”* but endures for ever as *“his mercy endureth for ever”* (Ps 136:1). Whatever we have done or are doing, if it is not out of our love for God and for others, it is just like *“wood, hay, stubble”* which *“shall be burned”* (1 Cor 3:12,15) without any reward.

THOUGHT: Am I doing God’s Word and God’s will out of love?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to love Thee and do Thy Word and Thy will.

BETTER TO DO GOD’S WORD AND WILL (1)

God is love and He wants us to love Him and to love one another. To love God means to keep His Word. *“If a man love me, he will keep my words...”* (John 14:23). But many are living, worshipping and serving God without regard to His Word and will! They are very open, friendly and compromising, and willing to work with other “brethren” despite their different faiths, beliefs or doctrines as long as their church is “growing”! That seems to be “good,” but it is not good in God’s sight at all. The most important thing is to do God’s Word and will. The following are the Lord Jesus’ warnings to us:

(1) Not all shall enter into the kingdom of heaven but *“he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven”* (Matt 7:21).

(2) Not all are Jesus’ sheep: *“But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep...My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me”* (John 10:26-27). And not all are God’s children, but *“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty”* (2 Cor 6:17-18).

(3) Not all are Jesus’ brethren, but *“whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother”* (Matt 12:50).

(4) Not all are Jesus’ friends, but *“Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you”* (John 15:14).

(5) Not all are Jesus’ disciples because *“whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple”* (Luke 14:27).

(6) Not all servants will be rewarded, but only *“good and faithful servant”* (Matt 25:21, 23) and *“he that overcometh”* (Rev 21:7).

(7) Not all shall be “raptured” and see the Lord, but only those who *“watch”* and *“be...ready”* (Matt 24:40-44) and *“follow...holiness”* (Heb 12:14).

THOUGHT: Many will be shocked as they are not truly the Lord’s!

PRAYER: Lord, help me to do Thy Word and will always.

BETTER TO DO GOD'S WORD AND WILL (2)

Failing to do God's Word and will is serious: With deceitful hearts and the deceit from Satan, many are deceived into thinking that they are right or doing the right things while they fail to do God's will and Word! God's Word is God's will. *"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves"* (James 1:22). Adam and Eve failed to keep God's Word and do God's will, but fell into the temptation of Satan and were cursed (Gen 3:1-19). Failing to do God's will is serious! King Saul failed to carefully and wholeheartedly keep God's Word and do God's will, so he was rejected (1 Sam 15:22-23). It is serious!

Thus, we must have a heart's desire to know and do God's will, to read God's Word, and to pray for God's revelation to know His will and for God's strength to do His will.

Have a heart's desire to know and do God's will: Many do not seek God's will or wait for God's will. They just do what they want or like. They can see, watch, hear, say, or do whatever they like and go wherever they like regardless of God's Word and will! We must be born again so that we may have the heart's desire to seek and do God's will. *"I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart"* (Ps 40:8). We must be like our Lord Jesus Christ who says, *"I come to do thy will, O God"* (Heb 10:9), and *"My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work"* (John 4:34), and *"I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me"* (John 5:30), and *"For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me"* (John 6:38). The climax of our Lord Jesus' submission to His Father's will is His prayer to His Father in the Garden of Gethsemane: *"O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done"* (Matt 26:42). Do we truly desire to know and do God's will and submit to God's will even as our Lord Jesus Christ did on earth?

THOUGHT: It is a serious matter not to do God's Word and will!

PRAYER: Lord, help me to fear Thee and to desire to do Thy will.

MONDAY, JANUARY 26

PSALM 143

PSALM 143:10

*“Teach me to do thy will;
for thou art my God...”*

BETTER TO DO GOD’S WORD AND WILL (3)

Read God’s Word with a teachable, trusting and submissive heart: God has revealed His will to us through His written Word (the Holy Scriptures) and through His living Word (the Lord Jesus Christ). Many read God’s Word but fail to understand God’s will. They even misinterpret God’s Word to serve their own purpose and goal! What proper attitudes do we need to have to read God’s Word? We must read God’s Word with a teachable, trusting, reverent and submissive heart without any doubt, question or criticism. Then the Holy Spirit will help us to understand and know God’s will. *“...but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word”* (Isa 66:2).

Pray to God for His revelation and strength: Acknowledging our foolishness and weakness, when we read God’s Word we must pray to God for His illumination to help us know and understand God’s Word and will as well as pray for His strength to do God’s Word and will. God’s command is: *“Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is”* (Eph 5:17). If we fail to understand God’s will, we are unwise or foolish! Praying with full submission to God’s will is vital to knowing God’s will. *“Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven”* (Matt 6:10). *“Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness”* (Ps 143:10). We must thank God for the prayer ministry of the Holy Spirit *“because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God”* (Rom 8:27). We must thank God for His gracious work in our hearts. *“For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure”* (Phil 2:13). Having known God’s will, we must also pray for God’s strength to keep His Word and to do His will (Col 1:9-11). It is a blessing to pray for one another *“that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God”* (Col 4:12). What about you?

THOUGHT: Do I read God’s Word with prayer and submission?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to know and do Thy Word and will.

BETTER TO KNOW WHAT GOD’S WILL IS (1)

To be blessed by God, we must know and do His will. But, what is God’s will for us?

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ: *“And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day”* (John 6:40). God loves mankind, including us, so much that He gave His only begotten Son, who came to die for our sins and rose again for our justification and salvation (Rom 4:25). Not only did Jesus die and rise again to save us and give us eternal life, He also continues to be with us, to help, to guide, and to care for us as our Good Shepherd. In all things, we must turn to, trust in, and submit to the Lord Jesus Christ, for this is God’s will for us. Not only for our salvation but also for grace, strength, life, victory and blessings. We must turn our eyes to Jesus and trust in Him in all things. Jesus says, *“My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness”* (2 Cor 12:9). We must thank God for our Lord Jesus Christ’s help each day. *“O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord... Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us”* (Rom 7:24-25; 8:37).

Knowing that God wants mankind including our loved ones and friends and others to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved, we should pray for them and share the Lord Jesus Christ and His salvation with them. *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house”* (Acts 16:31). As only the Lord Jesus Christ is able to save them and bless them, *“we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake”* (2 Cor 4:5). All thanks, praise, and glory must be to God and to our Saviour Jesus Christ alone! Do you always turn to Jesus for help?

THOUGHT: God wants me to trust and obey His Son Jesus Christ.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to trust in Thee and share Thee with others.

BETTER TO KNOW WHAT GOD’S WILL IS (2)

Read and keep God’s Word: “*This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success*” (Josh 1:8). God has revealed His will to us through His Word, and God wants us to read His Word, to meditate on His Word day and night, and to carefully observe to do according to His Word. Failing to read God’s Word or keep God’s Word is to fail to do God’s will. And this is sin! Do we read God’s Word and seek to do God’s will faithfully every day?

Fear and love God and love mankind: Through God’s Word, we know that God commands us to “*fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man*” (Eccles 12:13), and “*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*” (Matt 22:37-39). It is your duty and mine to fear God, love God and keep His commandments. To love God, we must worship God and serve Him alone, honour His name, and keep His day of rest holy, with all our hearts, souls and minds. Do we truly fear God and love Him?

To love our neighbour as ourselves, we must honour our parents, and do good things to others without any harm or damage to their lives, reputation, or possessions. “*For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law*” (Rom 13:9-10). Are we doing God’s will?

THOUGHT: Do I truly fear God, love Him and love my neighbours?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to love Thee and to love my neighbours.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 29

1 THESSALONIANS 4:1-12

1 THESSALONIANS 4:3

“...this is the will of God,
even your sanctification...”

BETTER TO KNOW WHAT GOD’S WILL IS (3)

Be sanctified and be like Christ: “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication” (1 Thess 4:3). “Be ye holy; for I am holy.” (1 Pet 1:16). To be sanctified, we must separate ourselves from sins, self, worldliness, dedicate ourselves to the Lord and let Him dwell in us and control us. We must also thank God for His good and holy will to transform us “to the image of his Son” (Rom 8:29)! Then, we must look unto the Lord Jesus Christ and walk in His steps. “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb 12:2). “...Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps” (1 Pet 2:21). Do we follow Jesus and His holy example?

As “he that saith he abideth in him (Jesus) ought himself also so to walk, even as he (Jesus) walked” (1 John 2:6), we must look unto the Lord Jesus Christ and imitate Him in all things — in words and deeds, in prayer, in humble service, in meekness and love, in sacrifice, in separation from sin and worldliness, in obedience to God the Father, in worship, in preaching and teaching, in holiness and righteousness, in longsuffering and perseverance, in spiritual warfare against Satan and temptations, etc. Do we always do that?

The difference between Christianity and other religions is having Jesus’ life! Without Christ, no one can live a holy life as He does. We must thank the Lord Jesus because He is willing to live with us and in us and manifest His life through us. “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me...” (Gal 2:20). “Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body” (2 Cor 4:10). Does Jesus Christ live in us?

THOUGHT: Without Jesus Christ, I can never live as He lived.

PRAYER: Lord, please live in me and manifest Thy life in me.

BETTER TO KNOW WHAT GOD’S WILL IS (4)

Do good things despite sufferings: *“For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing”* (1 Pet 3:17). God wants us to do good things although we might encounter contempt, opposition, or persecutions. We should not be surprised and *“think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you...But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy”* (1 Pet 4:12-13).

Be thankful to God in all things: No matter what happens to us, God wants us to be thankful to Him. *“In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you”* (1 Thess 5:18). We must thank God for who He is — our Creator and Maker, our loving Father, our Saviour Jesus Christ, our Comforter the Holy Spirit. We must thank God for His gift of life each day that we are still alive, still able to see, to hear, and to move, *“for in him we live, and move, and have our being”* (Acts 17:28). We must be thankful to God for His good creation which we can enjoy. Just imagine: how can we live and survive without the air, the sun, the water, the food, etc (Ps 136)?

We must thank God for His great salvation and eternal life in the Lord Jesus Christ because we only deserve to be condemned due to our sins. We must thank God for His grace, love, mercy, peace, joy and comfort that the world cannot give to us. We must thank God for His Word and truth, for His faithfulness, provision, guidance, protection, and many other blessings. We must also thank God in illness, afflictions, failures, losses, problems, difficulties, troubles, trials, or persecutions, which God is able to turn to our good — to refine us, to keep us humble and closer to Him, and to make us more mature and more like Christ. Giving thanks to God in all things without murmuring shows our trust in God and in His sovereignty, our humble submission, and our honour to do God’s will.

THOUGHT: Do I truly thank God for all things and in all things?

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for all things and in all things.

BETTER TO PROVE WHAT IS ACCEPTABLE TO GOD

When we cannot find direct instructions from God’s Word concerning certain activities, practices, habits, hobbies, fashions, etc, what shall we do? God commands us to prove or examine *“what is acceptable unto the Lord”* (Eph 5:10). Many things are acceptable unto man, but may not be unto God. We must ask ourselves the following questions before we say or do something:

1. Does it glorify God? *“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God”* (1 Cor 10:31).
2. Would the Lord Jesus do it that way on earth? *“And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him”* (Col 3:17).
3. Does it draw me closer to the Lord in holiness? *“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord”* (Heb 12:14). *“Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded”* (James 4:8).
4. Does it make me conform to the world in ungodliness? *“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God”* (Rom 12:2).
5. Is it profitable and edifying? *“All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not”* (1 Cor 10:23).
6. Does it enslave me? *“All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any”* (1 Cor 6:12).
7. Does it cause others to stumble or fall away from God’s Truth? *“But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak”* (1 Cor 8:9).

THOUGHT: Do I carefully prove what is acceptable unto the Lord?

PRAYER: Lord, may I prove and do things acceptable unto Thee.

BETTER TO GLORIFY GOD ALONE (1)

The Lord Jesus Christ humbled Himself and came into the world with the purpose of glorifying His Father and to finish the work His Father had given Him to do, even God's salvation for mankind through His death and resurrection. *“I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do”* (John 17:4). Can we say the same to God when we are about to leave this world? God wants us to receive His salvation for ourselves personally, to live for Him and for His glory and to share His salvation with others. In situations where we do not know God's will directly from the Holy Bible, we can ask ourselves, “Does it glorify God alone when we say, behave, do, live, preach, or teach like that?”

The term “*glorify*” in Greek is *doxazō*, meaning “to recognise, honour, praise.... To glorify God, meaning to render glory to Him, recognize Him for Who and What He is, to celebrate with praises, worship, adoration” (Zodhiates). Are we living to glorify God in whatever we say and do and wherever we are? Do we recognise God, acknowledge His sovereignty, appreciate His grace, and render glory to God in our worship, in our ministry, and in our personal life at home, at school, at work or at play?

To glorify God is God's command, *“Ye that fear the LORD, praise him... glorify him; and fear him...”* (Ps 22:23), and *“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God”* (1 Cor 10:31), and *“For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's”* (1 Cor 6:20). We must glorify God in our body by keeping our body from sins and using it as an instrument to do God's will and Word. We must glorify God in our spirit by keeping our hearts and minds in communion with Him with our reverence, honour, love, gratitude, obedience, submission, praise and worship. If we fail to glorify God or if God is not glorified and honoured in whatever we say or do in our life and in our ministry, we have failed to keep God's commandment, and it is sin!

THOUGHT: Is God glorified in my life and ministry?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to recognise and glorify Thee in all things.

BETTER TO GLORIFY GOD ALONE (2)

Many are living for themselves and for worldly fame and glory without any regard for God, their Creator and Maker, and for what He wants them to do. And this is not pleasing to God at all. *“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness... Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened”* (Rom 1:18, 21). What about us?

The Lord Jesus Christ still commands His followers, *“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven”* (Matt 5:16). The Lord Jesus Christ is *“the light of the world”* (John 8:12), and He wants us to reflect His Light and Life to the people around us in this world of darkness. Do they glorify and praise our heavenly Father when they see our lives? If not, how can we glorify God?

Be born-again with a godly desire and purpose to glorify God alone: Due to man’s totally depraved, corrupt, rebellious, deceitful, sinful and wicked nature, we naturally do not have any purpose, motive, goal or desire to glorify God in our hearts, minds and lives. Non-believers naturally just think of themselves and how to promote themselves to get glory and praise from men. The Lord Jesus exposed the self-centred hearts of the Jewish leaders who *“receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only”* (John 5:44). Even when they knew God, they did not glorify God, but rejected and crucified the Messiah! As *“all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”* (Rom 3:23), only when we are saved and born again can we have a godly desire and purpose to glorify God like David who said, *“I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart: and I will glorify thy name for evermore”* (Ps 86:12) and like John the Baptist, *“He (Christ) must increase, but I must decrease”* (John 3:30).

THOUGHT: Do I truly purpose in my life to glorify God alone?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to live for Thy glory alone.

BETTER TO GLORIFY GOD ALONE (3)

Be controlled by the Holy Spirit and bear His fruit: When we are born again, we are partakers of God's divine nature (2 Pet 1:4), but our old man is still in us. There will be a conflict between the new man and the old man in our hearts. The new man desires to do what is good and right to glorify God, but the old man, like the force of gravity, always pulls us down to sin. We can only overcome this spiritual warfare through the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. *"O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord..."* (Rom 7:24-25) and *"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death"* (Rom 8:2). If we are weak and dying, we cannot stand up, raise our hands, or move around, but lie down due to the force of gravity. However, if we are healthy, lively and strong, we can overcome gravity and stand up, move around and work although the force of gravity is still there. Spiritually speaking, if we are spiritually strong and healthy by feeding on God's Word and by the Holy Spirit, we can overcome the old man in us and do God's will to glorify God. This truth reminds us to humble ourselves and depend on the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit moment by moment like the branches which depend on the vine for nutrients.

The Lord Jesus confirms, *"He (the Holy Spirit) shall glorify me"* (John 16:14), and *"Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples"* (John 15:8). Therefore, the more we submit to the control of the Holy Spirit, and the more we bear His fruit, the more we shall glorify God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We must *"be filled with the Spirit"* (Eph 5:18) and bear His fruit of *"love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance"* (Gal 5:22-23) and *"fruit unto holiness"* (Rom 6:22), and *"all goodness and righteousness and truth"* (Eph 5:9). If not, we can never glorify God in our lives and ministry, no matter how successful we may be in the world.

THOUGHT: Do I bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to humbly depend on Thee that I may glorify Thee with my life.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 4

PSALM 50

PSALM 50:23

“Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me...”

BETTER TO GLORIFY GOD ALONE (4)

Seek God and His glory first and love Him above all: God commands us to “*seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness...*” (Matt 6:33) and “*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind*” (Matt 22:37). If we fail to seek God first and love Him above all, we can never glorify God as we would have no interest or delight in Him. We would have turned His glory into shame. “*O ye sons of men, how long will ye turn my glory into shame? how long will ye love vanity, and seek after leasing?*” (Ps 4:2). What about us?

Do God’s Will and Word: Jesus came to do His Father’s will and to obey His Word. “*For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me*” (John 6:38). So He could pray to His Father, “*I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do*” (John 17:4). If we fail to do God’s will and keep His Word, it is sin and we can neither please God nor glorify Him. God has magnified His Word above all His Name (Ps 138:2), so those who doubt, question, or criticise God’s Word really dishonour God and His holy Name. Jesus challenges us: “*My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it*” (Luke 8:21).

Give all thanks, praise and glory to God: When we truly acknowledge God’s sovereignty, grace, love and blessings despite our unworthiness and nothingness, we shall give thanks, praise and glory to God alone. When others praise us or thank us, we can sincerely say to them, “Thank God for His grace and mercy,” giving all glory to God alone. If we fail to thank God but always complain or murmur, we can never glorify God. “*Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me...*” (Ps 50:23), and “*That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Rom 15:6). We glorify God more when we can thank and praise God in our troubles or trials like Job.

THOUGHT: Do I really love God and keep His Word with thanksgiving?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to love Thee, thank Thee and do Thy will.

BETTER TO WALK AS JESUS WALKED (1)

We must thank God, our Creator and Maker, for having chosen us and saved us in the Lord Jesus Christ by His grace and mercy alone, not by our good works, merits or efforts. Once we are saved, we are not our own as we have been redeemed and bought with a very high price — the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus came to die for our sins and rose again for our justification. We must bear the good fruit of a saved and redeemed believer, using our bodies and spirits to glorify God. *“For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s”* (1 Cor 6:20).

God’s purpose is to transform His children into the image of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 8:29). The Lord Jesus lived a perfect life on earth to give us a perfect example to follow. *“For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you”* (John 13:15; cf. 1 Pet 2:21). Are we following our Lord Jesus Christ’s example and His steps in what and how we say, do, behave, worship, serve and suffer?

If we are true Christians, we are bearing the Lord Jesus’ name in our lives. God commands us to say and do all things in the Lord Jesus’ holy Name. *“And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him”* (Col 3:17). We will take the Lord Jesus’ Name in vain when we say, read, listen to, watch and do the things that the Lord Jesus would not do. Are we walking or living as Jesus walked and lived? *“He that saith he abideth in him (Jesus) ought himself also so to walk, even as he (Jesus) walked”* (1 John 2:6).

In situations where we do not know God’s will directly from the Holy Bible, we can turn to the Lord Jesus Christ and ask ourselves, “What would the Lord Jesus say or do in this situation?”

THOUGHT: God wants me to be like the Lord Jesus Christ.

PRAYER: Lord, transform me and help me to live as Thou lived on earth.

BETTER TO WALK AS JESUS WALKED (2)

No one on earth can live as Jesus lived. When God had His purpose and will for us to be like His Son Jesus, He foreknew that He must do His own good work in us to transform us into the image of His Son. *“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ... For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure”* (Phil 1:6; 2:13). Without God’s gracious work in us, we shall be undone for ever. However, we have to fulfil our part and responsibility to manifest God’s sovereign work of grace in our lives. We must have a heart-knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, have the same mind and purpose as He has, humbly depend on Him, and let Him manifest His life through us.

Know our Lord Jesus Christ with a heart knowledge: Can we follow our Lord Jesus’ example without knowing Him? Absolutely not! God commands us to *“grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ”* (2 Pet 3:18). Growing in His knowledge means we must know the Lord better each day. How can we know more about our Lord Jesus? We must read the Holy Bible, and through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, we can know more about the Lord Jesus Christ and appreciate Him and highly value Him above all. *“Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord...”* (Phil 3:8). Knowing that Jesus humbly sought God first in prayer, we ought to do the same. Knowing that Jesus never doubted God’s Word but lived by God’s Word and used God’s Word to preach, to teach and to overcome Satan, we ought to do the same. Knowing that Jesus lived a holy, godly and humble life to serve God and men, we ought to do the same. Knowing that Jesus endured contempt, envy, hatred, false accusations, persecutions, and obeyed His Father unto death, we ought to do the same. Do we?

THOUGHT: Do I know the Lord and live as He lived on earth?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to know Thee and walk as Thou walked.

BETTER TO WALK AS JESUS WALKED (3)

Have the same mind and purpose as Jesus has: To know about the Lord Jesus Christ is not enough. We must have the same mind and purpose as He has, *“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus... he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross”* (Phil 2:5, 8). A natural man has a rebellious, vain, fleshly and corrupt mind (Rom 8:7; Eph 4:17; Col 2:18; 1 Tim 6:5). He naturally minds *“the things of the flesh”* (Rom 8:5) and *“earthly things”* (Phil 3:19). He cannot understand spiritual things and even regards them as *“foolishness”* (1 Cor 2:14). Therefore, only when we are saved and born again by God’s grace, God’s Word and by the Holy Spirit can we have a renewed mind and the mind of Christ. *“For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ”* (1 Cor 2:16) to mind *“the things of the Spirit”* (Rom 8:5).

Jesus came to do His Father’s will (John 6:38), not His own will or the will of any man. We ought to do the same. Jesus came to *“bear witness unto the truth”* (John 18:37) and to preach and teach God’s Truth. We ought to do the same. Jesus came to glorify His Father and to finish the work His Father gave Him to do (John 17:4) without any waste of time for worldly things. We ought to do the same. Jesus came to serve, to seek the lost and to save sinners (Matt 9:13; 20:28), not to entertain them or attract them with material blessings, the social gospel or worldly values and entertainments. We ought to do the same. Jesus came to train His disciples to continue God’s work of salvation on earth after His ascension. We ought to do the same. It is better and more important to have a few faithful brethren who will continue to stand firm on God’s Word and to continue His work when we are no longer around than to have many who will compromise and not wholeheartedly submit to the Lord and His Truth.

THOUGHT: Jesus is not pleased if I fail to imitate Him!

PRAYER: Lord, help me walk closer with Thee in all things!

BETTER TO DRAW NIGH TO GOD (1)

We have already considered two questions which we must ask ourselves before we say or do something: (1) "Does it glorify God?" and (2) "Would the Lord Jesus do it that way on earth?" Now we shall continue with the third question: "Does it draw me closer to God in holiness?" Why should we ask this question before we do something? Simply because it is God's command! *"Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded"* (James 4:8). It is not wise at all to ignore or to disobey God's command. Like a foolish man who builds his house on sand, it will collapse sooner or later when the heavy rain, the flood or the strong wind comes. Likewise, those who ignore God's commands will not have the grace and strength from the Lord, so they cannot stand firm when troubles, temptations, afflictions, trials or tribulations come. Our disregard of God's command shows our arrogance, rebellion and disobedience, and it is sin. It is always good and wise to remember and keep God's commands. Then, God will bless and honour us. *"...God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble"* (James 4:6) and *"...for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed"* (1 Sam 2:30).

The verb *"draw nigh"* in Greek is *eggizo*, which means "come near, draw near, be near" (Zodhiates). Do we draw near or come near to God? As God is holy and righteous, God commands us to cleanse our hands and purify our hearts when we come near to Him. Cleansing our hands means to cleanse our conduct and deeds from sins by confessing our sins to the Lord. We can have His cleansing by His precious blood. *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9). *"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin"* (1 John 1:7).

THOUGHT: Do I purify myself before coming near to God each day?

PRAYER: Lord, keep me closer to Thee in my sanctification.

BETTER TO DRAW NIGH TO GOD (2)

“Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded” (James 4:8). The verb “purify” in Greek is *hagnizo*, which means “to make clean, to purify, to consecrate. Metaphorically, to render pure in a moral sense, to reform (James 4:8; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:3). Used not only with the meaning of purifying or cleansing, but also with the collateral meaning of consecration” (Zodhiates). “Double minded” in Greek is *dipsuchos*, i.e. “*dís*, twice, and *psuche*, soul, mind. Double-minded, doubtful. In James 1:8, referring to the doubter or waverer which corresponds to *diakrínō*; in the plural, in a general sense as an unstable person (James 4:8). Such a person suffers from divided loyalties. On the one hand, he wishes to maintain a religious confession and desires the presence of God in his life; on the other hand, he loves the ways of the world and prefers to live according to its mores and ethics” (Zodhiates). Here, God commands us to purify our hearts, minds, motives and conscience, and be loyal to Him and serve Him alone as our Master.

God does not command us to do anything without providing His sufficient grace and means to do it, all for His glory alone. God is holy and righteous, and He hates sins, while we are sinful and unrighteous. How then can we draw near to God? The Lord Jesus has already come and died for our sins and shed His precious blood to cleanse us from all our sins and unrighteousness. Jesus rose again and is ever living to make intercession for us (Heb 7:25). “*Having... boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus... Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith...*” (Heb 10:19, 22). Jesus’ blood is always powerful and ready to cleanse us so that we can draw near to God. If we fail to keep God’s command to “draw nigh to God,” it is totally our fault. It is as if water is always available, but we are dirty and smelly because we just refuse to take a shower!

THOUGHT: I can come near to God through Christ and His blood.

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for helping me to come near to Thee.

BETTER TO DRAW NIGH TO GOD (3)

God's Word does not give us commands for all our particular activities in detail, especially in our modern days, but His command for us to draw near to Him in holiness must be our guiding principle for all our motives, decisions, choices and activities. In all our activities, we must ask ourselves, “Does it draw me closer to God in holiness?” Listening to worldly music will not draw our hearts and minds closer to God, so it is wise for us to stop doing it. Watching worldly movies, worldly TV programmes, dramas or videos will defile our hearts and minds and draw us away from the holy God, so it is wise for us to stop doing it. We must do the same with computer games, trashy articles or pornography in the newspaper, magazine or from the Internet. It is also wise to decline an invitation to a worldly party with beer, wine and dancing because we know such worldly pleasures only draw us away from the holy God. We should also be careful when making friends or choosing a life partner who may draw us away from God. It is always wise to keep ourselves clean and pure from ungodly friendship and communications. *“Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners”* (1 Cor 15:33).

We must also pray for God's guidance when choosing a career that will not draw us away from God. When we have to choose a place to stay, we also have to stay away from ungodly places like *“Sodom and Gomorrah.”* It is very important to choose a Bible-believing church to attend and worship in spirit and in truth, or to choose a sound Bible college to enrol in, etc. I personally thank God for guiding me to the Far Eastern Bible College in Singapore to enjoy the sound teaching and training; otherwise, I would not be what I am today. We must never compromise to tolerate sins, worldliness, or wrong doctrines. *“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you”* (2 Cor 6:17).

THOUGHT: It is better to draw near to God in all things in my life.

PRAYER: Lord, keep me close to Thee in spirit and in truth.

BETTER NOT TO BE CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD (1)

What are your desires, purposes or goals in this world? Many do not care about God, their Creator and Maker, or their spiritual life. The world before them is so nice and so attractive with many things to explore, to achieve and to enjoy. To enjoy the world with a luxurious lifestyle and with whatever they like, they must have money and more money. They study hard to get a well-paid job or they work hard and do their business to earn more money. With money, they can get the things they like and all the comforts they want. For others, they study hard and work hard in order to achieve a good position in society with power, fame and popularity. Satan is the *“prince of this world”* (John 12:31), and he has painted this world to appear so nice, so beautiful, so attractive, so bright, and so glorious, to draw many away from God and His Truth. Sadly many have fallen into Satan’s trap unawares! What about us? It is not wrong for us to study hard and work hard to be successful and to earn money to support ourselves and our loved ones, but we must do all to God’s glory, and we must use what God has given us to serve Him and to extend His kingdom on earth. We are to be His faithful stewards, knowing that one day when He comes we will have to give an account to our Master. What about your desires, goals and ambitions?

God commands His people to: *“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world... For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world”* (1 John 2:15-16). The world is against God. Those who loved the world despised, rejected, hated, persecuted and crucified the Lord Jesus Christ. So do many today. They do not want Jesus to be their Lord and King! God’s Word declares that being *“a friend of the world is the enemy of God”* (James 4:4). It is serious!

THOUGHT: Am I a friend of the Lord Jesus or of the world?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to wisely choose Thee as my Friend for ever.

BETTER NOT TO BE CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD (2)

Jesus still prays to His Father for His followers: *“I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth”* (John 17:14-17).

Jesus Christ sacrificed Himself to save us from sin and the condemnation of sin as well as to bring us out of this cursed and hostile world. That is the meaning of the Church, *ekklesia*, a called-out people from sin and the world to belong to Christ. Do we belong to the Lord or to the world? Jesus came into the world to carry out God’s work of salvation for mankind and then He returned to His Father. *“My kingdom is not of this world...”* (John 18:36). We must have the same mind, perspective and attitude that Jesus has.

God’s Word commands us to *“be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God”* (Rom 12:2). *“‘Conform’* in Greek is *suschmatizô*, from *sún*, together with, and *schematizo*, to fashion. To fashion alike, conform to the same pattern outwardly. In Romans 12:2, *‘be not conformed’*. An expanded rendering might read, ‘Stop being molded by the external and fleeting fashions of this age, but undergo a deep inner change by the qualitative renewing of your mind’” (Zodhiates). Satan is *“the god of this world”* who *“hath blinded the minds of them which believe not”* (2 Cor 4:4), and he is still using the world to choke God’s Word that has been sown in man’s heart (Matt 13:22). It is a serious thing when one brings unbiblical teachings, worldly ideas, counselling, music, fashions and entertainments into the church.

THOUGHT: It is against God’s will to be conformed to this world!

PRAYER: Lord, help me to die to the world and live for Thee.

BETTER NOT TO BE CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD (3)

Satan still uses the world to draw many away from God and His Truth. To overcome Satan and the world, we must be born again; to take up our cross and to die to the world; to humbly depend on the Lord and trust in Him; and to resist Satan with God’s Word and prayer.

Be born again and have our mind renewed: Satan showed the Lord Jesus Christ “*all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them*” (Matt 4:8) and then tempted the Lord Jesus Christ to worship him to gain the world with its worldly glory and values. But the Lord Jesus Christ saw this world differently—a cursed world full of darkness of sins, immorality, injustice, deception, ungodliness, unrighteousness, evil, wickedness—and this world will one day be destroyed! With His holy mind and foresight, the Lord overcame Satan by God’s Word. He said to Satan, “*Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve*” (Matt 4:10).

Satan is still tempting many with the things of this world. We must be born again and have the same holy mind of Christ (1 John 5:4; 1 Cor 2:16) so that we can see this world in the way Jesus sees it and “*be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God*” (Rom 12:2). Those professing “Christians” who are not born again will naturally love the world and will feel miserable like a fish out of water when they are in a Bible-believing church that promotes God’s Word and sanctification!

Take up our cross and die to the world: We are living in the world, but we do not belong to the world, and this world is not our home. We are here for a purpose: to be Jesus’ witnesses for a short time, and then we shall be with Him forever when we are called home or when Jesus comes again. Are we living for our Lord Jesus Christ?

THOUGHT: Do I belong to the Lord or to the world?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to overcome Satan and worldliness each day.

BETTER NOT TO BE CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD (4)

Satan is real and his temptations are real. To overcome Satan and worldliness, we must not only be born again to have Jesus' mind and to take up our cross to follow Him, but we must also depend on Him and trust in Him to resist Satan with God's Word and prayer.

Humbly depend on the Lord Jesus Christ and trust in Him moment by moment like the branches on the vine: *"I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing"* (John 15:5). We cannot do anything acceptable unto God nor fight a good fight to overcome Satan and worldliness without the Lord Jesus. We must turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, rely on Him, and wholeheartedly trust in Him. *"For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?"* (1 John 5:4-5). Believing that Jesus is the Son of God means believing that Jesus is the very God, who is almighty, all-wise, all-knowing, eternal, sovereign, holy, righteous, good, loving, gracious, merciful and faithful; and who is able to help and enable us to overcome Satan and the world. *"Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us"* (Rom 8:37). Thanks, praise and glory be unto the Lord alone!

Resist Satan with God's Word and with our prayers: Eve was in a much better environment than the Lord Jesus. She was neither hungry nor thirsty in a fruitful garden, while Jesus was hungry and thirsty after forty days in the wilderness! Sadly, Adam and Eve fell into Satan's temptation because they failed to resist Satan with prayer to God and with God's Word. However, the Lord Jesus Christ resisted Satan and overcame him with prayer and with God's Word. We must do the same (James 4:7; cf. Matt 26:41).

THOUGHT: Do I submit to the Lord to resist Satan?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to humbly depend on Thee to get the victory.

BETTER TO DO PROFITABLE AND EDIFYING THINGS (1)

Due to the fall of Adam and Eve, human nature is naturally selfish—full of self-will, self-love, self-glory, self-importance, self-promotion, self-righteousness, etc. Consequently, we can see moral and spiritual decline everywhere, especially in these last days. *“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers (covenant breakers), false accusers, incontinent (unable to control one’s appetites), fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away”* (2 Tim 3:1-5). Even in the church environment, Paul wrote, *“I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s”* (Phil 2:20-21). What about us? Only thinking of oneself, loving oneself and seeking one’s own is being self-centred and idolatrous, contrary to God, to His Word, to His sacrificial love, and to the cross of Christ! Only God is able to save selfish sinners and transform their hearts to love God and care for others.

Read Paul’s testimony in 1 Timothy 1:12-15. When we are willing to submit ourselves to the Lord and His Word, like clay in the divine potter’s hand, He is able to transform our selfish and sinful hearts and lives to live for Him and to make us a blessing to others. Praise the Lord for His good and gracious work!

THOUGHT: A selfish heart and life is still far from God’s grace!

PRAYER: Lord, please continue Thy good and gracious work in me.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 16

1 CORINTHIANS 10:14-33

1 CORINTHIANS 10:23

“...all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.”

BETTER TO DO PROFITABLE AND EDIFYING THINGS (2)

“All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not” (1 Cor 10:23).

“‘Lawful’ (*exesti*) means it is possible, referring to moral possibility or propriety meaning it is lawful, right, permitted (Matt 12:4; Mark 6:18; Luke 6:4; 14:3; 1 Cor 10:23), can, may (Acts 8:37; 21:37). ‘Expedient’ (*sumphero*) means to bring together in one place (Acts 19:19); to be profitable, advantageous, to contribute or bring together for the benefit of another. Used either personally (1 Cor 6:12; 10:23) or impersonally, *sumpherei*, meaning that it is advantageous, profitable, good (Matt. 5:29, 30; 18:6; 19:10; John 11:50; 16:7). ‘Edify’ (*oikodomeo*) means to build, construct (Luke 6:48). Externally (Matt 16:18), ‘*On this stone I shall build my church.*’ Internally, in a good sense, to build up in the faith, to edify, to cause to advance in the divine light (1 Cor 8:1; 10:23; 14:4, 17; 1 Thess 5:11)” (Zodhiates).

Thus, although we are allowed to do something, we must be concerned for others, because not all things are profitable or edifying. In Paul’s situation, he knew that idols were nothing, and that there is only one living and true God, and that the earth is the Lord’s, but he did not eat food offered to idols in the temple. Why? Paul cared for others, especially young believers, as not all had the same knowledge as he did. Paul was concerned that they might be “*emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols*” (1 Cor 8:10).

Today, when we are invited to partake of food offered to idols, we must politely decline. Young believers may see us eating only once and conclude that it is fine for them too. Therefore, we must be careful in what we say, listen to, watch, read, eat, drink, put on, or do because not all are profitable and edifying.

THOUGHT: In all I do, am I concerned about the effects on others?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to love and consider others as Thou dost.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 17

1 THESSALONIANS 5:11-28

1 THESSALONIANS 5:11

“...edify one another...”

BETTER TO DO PROFITABLE AND EDIFYING THINGS (3)

Caring for the edification of others is not an option, but God’s command: *“Let no man seek his own, but every man another’s wealth”* (1 Cor 10:24). It is a sin if we seek to do what we like regardless of God, His Word and the edification of others. *“Let all things be done unto edifying”* (1 Cor 14:26), and *“all things”* here are without exception. It is a sin if what we have said or done has not edified others or built them up in their faith in God and God’s Word. *“Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do”* (1 Thess 5:11). It is God’s command here for us to *“edify one another,”* literally, “keep on edifying one another.” Also: *“Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers”* (Eph 4:29). Thus, God commands us to edify others in all things. This will show that we really care for others.

Doing all things for others’ edification is doing God’s command and following our Lord Jesus’ example: *“For even Christ pleased not himself...”* (Rom 15:3). So did Paul: *“...we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying”* (2 Cor 12:19). What about us? Do we really build others up in their faith in God and in God’s Word in whatever we say, write, preach, teach and do? Man, with his sinful and sceptical nature, will doubt God’s Word; and this is enough for Satan to cause man to doubt God’s Word more! Sadly, many so-called “Christian leaders” and “scholars” are helping Satan and man’s sinful nature to cause many to doubt God’s Word through their unbelief, textual criticism, and human methods to examine and determine God’s Word without faith or reverence! They have violated God’s command to do all things for others’ edification! It is serious as they will have to answer to God for what they have said, taught and done. The proper attitude is to tremble at God’s Word with faith and reverence either when hearing or preaching it: *“...to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word”* (Isa 66:2; cf. 1 Cor 2:1-5).

THOUGHT: Do I edify others and help them to trust in God’s Word?

PRAYER: Lord, may I tremble at Thy Word with trust and fear.

BETTER TO DO PROFITABLE AND EDIFYING THINGS (4)

How can we do all things for others' edification? We have to deal with our own “self” first by the cross of Christ, and then care for the edification of others by the love of Christ.

Die to self and let Christ live in us: Our Lord Jesus “*pleased not himself*” (Rom 15:3), but “*humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*” (Phil 2:8). Therefore, we must do the same. Read Jesus' challenge to us in Luke 9:23. Paul died to his “self” and let Christ live in him: “*I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me*” (Gal 2:20). What about us? There must be no more “what I will or like or want,” but “what God wills, likes and wants” me to do for the edification of others.

Let the love of Christ constrain us: Without Christ's love, we will not be able to do God's commands willingly or joyfully. Truly, if we love someone, we will be able to restrain ourselves from saying or doing anything that may hurt him, and we will be willing to do something to build him up in his faith in God and God's Word (2 Cor 5:14). Are we constrained by Christ's love? It is not man-made love, but Christ's love, the very love that compelled Him to humble Himself and come into this cursed and sinful world to die for mankind, including us! We really need Christ and His love “*both to will and to do of his good pleasure*” (Phil 2:13). We must not forget that it is also God's command for us to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and to love our neighbours as ourselves (Mark 12:29-31). “*Let all your things be done with charity (love)*” (1 Cor 16:14), and “*charity edifieth*” (1 Cor 8:1), and “*seeketh not her own*” (1 Cor 13:5).

THOUGHT: Without Christ and His sacrificial love, I am nothing.

PRAYER: Lord, please live in me and manifest Thy love in me.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 19

JOHN 8:31-47

JOHN 8:34

*“...Whosoever committeth sin
is the servant of sin.”*

BETTER TO BE A SERVANT OF CHRIST ALONE (1)

Surely everyone loves freedom, and no one wants to be under the bondage of any. Many are willing to sacrifice their lives to fight for freedom. Freedom is so precious. Many enjoy living in freedom but instead of appreciating and treasuring the freedom they have, they abuse it. They do not care about God or God's Word or the people around them. They just want to do what they like, believe what they like, say what they like, listen to what they like, watch what they like, dress the way they like, eat and drink what they like or go wherever they like as long as it is not against the law of their country. They think they do not need a Saviour. Do you think like that too? Jesus says, *“Whosoever committeth sin is the servant (slave) of sin”* (John 8:34). God's Word also says, *“He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning”* (1 John 3:8), and *“While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom (or of what) a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage”* (2 Pet 2:19). Are we slaves of sin, Satan, or corruption?

If we are defeated by sin, we are slaves of sin. If we are defeated by Satan, we are slaves of Satan. If we are defeated by anyone or anything, we are slaves of that person or that thing. Many are slaves to their own sinful nature with their sexual lusts, sinful desires or bad temper. Many are slaves to their self-will, proud ambitions, and rebellious nature, and so they cannot deny themselves nor submit themselves to the Lord and His Word. Many are slaves to worldliness and materialism, to gambling, drinking and smoking or even drugs; to worldly pleasures and entertainments, to movies, dramas and computer games, because they cannot live without it. Many cannot live without their friends. What about us?

THOUGHT: Am I a slave of anyone or anything except Christ?

PRAYER: Lord, please set me free from sins so that I am slave to Thee alone.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 20

ROMANS 7:1-25

JOHN 8:36

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

BETTER TO BE A SERVANT OF CHRIST ALONE (2)

Are we free indeed? Only the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and God's Word are able to make us free indeed.

Acknowledge our slavery: Many do not admit that they are slaves of sin and worldliness. They are even proud of their worldly and ungodly lifestyle. They do not care about God, their souls, their future or the Judgment Day. As a result, they do not need Jesus to save them! What about you? If we still enjoy living in sin and worldliness without any remorse, regret or conflict in our heart, we are not of the Lord, but of the world. We are still enslaved to sin and worldliness. In other words, we are not born again. God's Word says that those who are born again will not purposely and continually live in sin (1 John 3:9). This does not mean that God's children are sinless, but that they do not intentionally keep on committing sins as a habit. They acknowledge their weakness and sins and repent of their sins right away to maintain their fellowship with God. Moreover, they will also acknowledge their sinful flesh and slavery, will deal with it seriously, and will not ignore it or rest until they find the answer in Christ.

Cry unto the Lord for deliverance: Like a drowning man struggling to save himself and crying for help, Paul cried in his helplessness and hopelessness: *“O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”* Thank God for the answer in Christ, *“I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord”* (Rom 7:24-25). Paul was also determined not to be enslaved to anything (1 Cor 6:12). What about you? Have you earnestly and wholeheartedly cried unto Jesus for His help and deliverance? Jesus still promises, *“If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed”* (John 8:36).

THOUGHT: Jesus alone is my Saviour and Deliverer.

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for Thy salvation and deliverance.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 21

ROMANS 8:1-18

ROMANS 6:22

“...become servants to God,
ye have your fruit unto holiness,
and the end everlasting life.”

BETTER TO BE A SERVANT OF CHRIST ALONE (3)

Submit to God's Word and the control of the Holy Spirit: Jesus, confirming the true liberty through God's Word and Truth, says, *“If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”* (John 8:31-32). John 17:17, *“Thy word is truth.”* Those who are superstitious are so afraid of “bad luck” that they dare not go out on certain days, or eat certain food or drink, etc. However, when they know and believe the truth that God is sovereign and able to make all things work together for good to those who love Him (Rom 8:28), they are not afraid of “bad luck” any more. God's Truth has made them free! Those who follow man's religions and wrong doctrines are also under the bondage to unbiblical teachings, rituals, rites and practices. When they know the truth, they find true salvation and liberty in Christ. God's Truth has made them free! The more we read God's Word, believe it and submit to its authority, the more freedom or liberty we shall enjoy through God's Truth. Truly, *“ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”* Praise the Lord!

Not only do we need Jesus and God's Truth to set us free, we also need the Holy Spirit in order to enjoy God's liberty. Although we are born again, we still struggle with sin. To deal with it, we need the powerful life of Christ through the Holy Spirit. *“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death”* (Rom 8:2). *“Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty”* (2 Cor 3:17). Thus, the vital matter is whether we are in constant dependence on Jesus, the Holy Spirit and God's Word. Jesus is a good, holy and gracious Master! It is better to be a servant of Christ alone than of cruel and evil masters like sin, corruption and Satan. Paul was happy and blessed to be *“a servant (slave) of Jesus Christ”* (Rom 1:1). What about us?

THOUGHT: To be a slave of God leads to holiness and eternal life.

PRAYER: Lord, keep me dependant on Thee and Thy Word always.

BETTER NOT TO CAUSE OTHERS TO STUMBLE (1)

We live in a sinful world full of offences, stumbling blocks and scandals. Sometimes when we share the Gospel of Jesus Christ to unbelievers, they may say that they have Christian loved ones, relatives, friends, or neighbours who are neither good nor godly, and so they do not want to hear the Gospel. They have been offended by the bad examples of “Christians.” We are usually disappointed when we see those who are expected to be good and godly fall into sin with their sex, corruption or financial scandals. What happened to them? It is due to man’s sinful flesh as well as temptations from Satan and the world. However, man is totally responsible for what he does, and cannot push the blame to Satan or temptations. Jesus says in Matthew 18:7: *“Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!”*

We must be concerned about the people around us and not be a stumbling block to them due to our bad language, conduct, behaviour, our worldly friendship or our ungodly lifestyle. We have already learnt to ask six basic questions before we say or do something: (1) Does it glorify God? (2) Would the Lord Jesus do it that way on earth? (3) Does it draw me closer to the Lord in holiness? (4) Does it make me conform to the world in ungodliness? (5) Is it profitable and edifying? (6) Does it enslave me? Today we shall consider question (7): Does it cause others to stumble or fall away from God’s truth?

God commands us to *“take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak”* (1 Cor 8:9). *“Take heed lest”* in Greek is *blepete de mepos*, which means ‘watch out lest’, and *‘stumblingblock’* in Greek is *proskomma*, which means ‘a stone of stumbling’, ‘a cause of falling’” (Zodhiates). Do we really watch out lest we cause others to fall away from God’s Word and Truth?

THOUGHT: Causing others to stumble is a serious sin.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to build others up, not destroy them.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 23

MATTHEW 23:1-15

1 CORINTHIANS 8:12

“...when ye sin so against the
brethren, and wound their weak
conscience, ye sin against Christ.”

BETTER NOT TO CAUSE OTHERS TO STUMBLE (2)

It is a serious matter to stumble others and cause them to give up their faith in the Lord. Jesus says, *“But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!”* (Matt 18:6-7). “‘Offend’ in Greek is *skandalizo*, which means to cause to stumble and fall, to cause to offend, lead astray, lead into sin, fall away from the truth” (Zodhiates). A millstone is very heavy. If it is hanged round an offender’s neck and he is thrown into the sea, he will definitely drown. It is a serious offence to mislead people from God’s truth with human arguments, philosophies, teachings and traditions! Sadly, many so-called “Christian leaders” do this, casting doubts on God’s Word and twisting God’s Truth to serve their own goals and beliefs!

The Jewish leaders worked hard to proselytise others, but Jesus rebuked them for being hypocrites because they made these proselytes twofold more the children of hell (Matt 23:15). Looking at their bad examples, these proselytes (who did not know much about God’s law) thought that it would be fine to do as their leaders did, and they were even emboldened to do more wicked things. It is sad that the same thing happens in many churches today. They do not mind spending their time and efforts to evangelize, but the new converts (who do not know much about God’s Word) hear their unbiblical preaching and see their ungodly examples and worldly worship and think that it is fine for them to say, watch, listen to, dress, worship, and do what they like as long as they still go to church and confess their faith in Jesus! It is so dangerous to ignore Jesus’ warning in Matthew 7:21.

THOUGHT: Do I cause others to depart from God’s truth?

PRAYER: Lord, please live in me and make me a blessing to others.

BETTER NOT TO CAUSE OTHERS TO STUMBLE (3)

Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit to warn the believers in Corinth not to offend brethren who were still immature in the faith and lacking in spiritual knowledge with their weak conscience. The mature brethren might know that there is only one living and true God and that all the heathen gods and idols are nothing. But if these weak brethren who do not have that knowledge see the mature brethren eating food offered to idols, they might think that they could do the same, and they may be emboldened to do even more. Consequently, their conscience is defiled and wounded by their acknowledgement of idols, and it is an abomination before God as God commands His people to worship Him only. It is a serious matter to offend immature brethren and cause them to do things that are against God's will and Word, and it is a sin against Christ! *“And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ”* (1 Cor 8:11-12). What about us?

God's commandment to us is: *“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind...And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself”* (Matt 22:37, 39). With Christ's love constraining us, we shall be able to avoid offending our Lord and others by not doing what we like but doing what God wants us to do for the edification of others. Truly, *“He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him”* (1 John 2:10).

We must abstain from saying, eating, drinking, watching, listening to, and doing the things or going to places that might offend others. Read 1 Corinthians 8:13 and Romans 14:21.

THOUGHT: Not all have the same faith and spiritual knowledge!

PRAYER: Lord, help me to love others and consider their spiritual life.

BETTER TO HAVE A GOOD NAME (1)

Many businesses and companies try their best to keep their good name or brand so that when the consumers hear their brand name and choose to buy their products, they will fully trust the quality of the products without any questions.

Many like nice and meaningful names. Some love the name of a famous person so much that they change their names to that name. However, due to man's sinful and deceitful nature, many cannot live up to their meaningful names. Some may even live a life contrary to their names. For example, Judas or Judah means "Praise the Lord," but Judas Iscariot betrayed the Lord! When the Bible tells us about a "*good name*," it refers to a good character, a good life, a good reputation and a good testimony. We may not have a nice name, but if by God's grace we live a good life with a good testimony that everyone can trust, then our lives are better than great riches and precious ointment. "*A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches...*" (Prov 22:1). "*A good name is better than precious ointment...*" (Eccles 7:1).

Many think that they secure a place in heaven because they have their names registered in a church or a religious organisation, but what is most important is whether their names are written in the Book of Life of the Lamb; otherwise, their future is in eternal misery and suffering. "*And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire*" (Rev 20:15). If you are among the prisoners who are gathered to hear the names of some who have been granted amnesty from the king or from the president on a special occasion, how would you feel if your name is not listed? But if you hear your name announced, you will be most joyful! All of us are sinners who deserve to be condemned. Why do we not rejoice and give thanks and praise to the Lord when our names are written in the Lord's Book of Life, and that is by grace through faith in Him alone? "*Notwithstanding ... rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven*" (Luke 10:20).

THOUGHT: Do others trust me when they hear of my name?

PRAYER: Lord, please keep me true to Thee and Thy Word always.

BETTER TO HAVE A GOOD NAME (2)

We have to keep our characters and our lives true to God and to His Word. What do people think when they hear of our names? What does the Lord think about us? It will be all in vain if you gain the whole world with all its values and glory, but your soul is not saved and your name is not written in the Book of Life. It is better to have our names written in heaven than anything else in the whole world.

Be born again: A “valid” good name must come from a good life, a good person. As all are sinners, and no one is good, we must be born again. *“Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God”* (John 3:5). A baby has its name registered legally in a country on earth, and a born-again believer has his name written in heaven. It is not because of what he has done, but because of what the Saviour Jesus Christ has done for him through His death, resurrection and intercession. If you are not sure that your name is written in heaven, just sincerely come to the Saviour Jesus Christ, humbly confess your sins to Him, and fervently ask Him to cleanse your heart, control your life and write your name in His Book of Life. This is by God’s grace and mercy alone, so all glory and praise must be unto the Lord alone.

Live a victorious life: Jesus says, *“He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels”* (Rev 3:5). Do you want your name to be confessed before God the Father and His angels? It is a great privilege. We must live a victorious life. While we are on earth, we will encounter many battles within and without since Satan does not want anyone to be saved. To obtain a good name, we must wholeheartedly trust in the Lord and depend on Him for victory. *“Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us”* (Rom 8:37).

THOUGHT: Am I born-again and living a victorious life in Christ?

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for Thy salvation and victory.

BETTER TO HAVE A GOOD NAME (3)

Keep God’s Word and do His will: Many professing believers think that they are saved and their names are written in heaven while they neither keep God’s Word nor do His will! They are just deceiving themselves! God’s Word says: *“For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book”* (Rev 22:18-19). It is serious if your “part” and mine are taken away out of the Book of Life! Sadly, many just blindly follow “scholars” or leaders who arrogantly criticise God’s Word and do not care about the omission or subtraction or modification or mistranslation found in new English versions of the Holy Bible! Many others neither live nor worship God according to God’s Word and God’s will! The Lord Jesus warns, *“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven”* (Matt 7:21). What about us?

Bear a good testimony: God wants us to be the salt of the earth and to be His reflected light to the world (Matt 5:13-14). God also wants us to set a good example to bear a good testimony to His Name. Are we *“an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity”* (1 Tim 4:12)? What do others think about us? We can neither be a good example nor bear a good testimony if others think we are “compromising,” or “lazy,” or “worldly,” or “ungodly,” or “selfish,” or “proud,” or “dishonest,” or “unreliable,” or “unfaithful,” or “hypocritical,” etc. We must be willing to deny ourselves and to count all things but loss to maintain a good testimony. We must be willing to follow the Lord Jesus, our perfect example, and to set a good example to others even when the majority do not. How we need our Lord and His grace to enable us to bear a good testimony!

THOUGHT: Always be sure my name is written in heaven!

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for writing my name in heaven.

BETTER TO HAVE A GOOD NAME (4)

Confess Jesus Christ before men: We must not be ashamed of Jesus and His Word. *"For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels"* (Luke 9:26). We must gladly count it an honour to confess Jesus before men without any shame (Matt 10:32). Jesus who is the Son of God and the very God Himself, the Creator and Maker, was not ashamed to humble Himself to be a Man, even a servant, to die for your sins and mine. Why are we ashamed of Him? We should not be ashamed but rather count it a privilege and a blessing even to suffer because of our Lord's blessed name. *"If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified"* (1 Pet 4:14).

Rejoice and give thanks and praise to the Lord: We must not take God's grace and salvation for granted or lightly. We must not forget that in order to be saved from sins and from the eternal Lake of Fire and to have our names written in heaven, the Lord Jesus had to suffer greatly, to die painfully and shamefully and to shed His blood to take away our sins! Many may rejoice because of God's blessings upon their lives and their ministry, but murmur and complain when unfavourable things happen to them. No, we must still rejoice and thank God because our *"names are written in heaven"* (Luke 10:20) and because it is a great privilege to bear our Saviour's blessed name. We must still rejoice even when we are despised and our names are evil-spoken of by the enemies of God's truth (Luke 6:22).

THOUGHT: Rejoice in the Lord, for my name is written in heaven!

PRAYER: Lord, help me to confess Thy Name before men gladly.

BETTER TO KEEP OURSELVES CLEAN AND PURE (1)

Most of us love to live in a clean environment, breathe in pure air, stay in a clean house, drive a clean car, eat clean food and use clean utensils or tools. Sadly, not many pay close attention to their hearts and their spiritual and moral lives, their worship and their ministry to make sure that these are clean and pure in God's sight!

It is dangerous for those who deceive themselves by thinking that they are holy, pure and clean, but in the sight of God, they are not. *“There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness”* (Prov 30:12). Jesus in His love had to rebuke the religious leaders in His days for their hypocrisy: *“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess...for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity”* (Matt 23:25-28). *“Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God”* (Luke 16:15). Here, the Lord Jesus says that God's holy standard is much higher than what men think. What *“is highly esteemed”* among men *“is abomination in the sight of God.”* Thus we have to compare ourselves with God's holy standard, even His holy written Word, the Holy Scriptures, and His holy living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ!

Many confess that they are Christians but do not carefully keep their hearts, souls, minds and tongues clean and pure in the sight of God. They want to enjoy life and walk in an easy and broad way with worldly values and pleasures, which are so appealing to their fleshly, selfish and worldly life. What about us?

THOUGHT: Am I clean and pure in the sight of the holy God?

PRAYER: Lord, search me, wash me and keep me clean and pure.

BETTER TO KEEP OURSELVES CLEAN AND PURE (2)

God commands His people to be holy: God is holy and pure, so He commands His people, including us, to be holy and pure (1 Pet 1:15-16). We must be “*holy in all manner of conversation.*” In other words, we must be holy in what we think and desire, what we believe and practise, what we say and do, and how we behave ourselves and conduct our lives in our study, work, play, worship or ministry. The next commandment is “*keep thyself pure*” (1 Tim 5:22). The verb “*keep*” (or “*guard*”) in Greek is in the present active imperative mood. The present tense denotes a continuous act of keeping or guarding. “Keep on guarding yourself pure” not only on the Lord’s Day among God’s people at the church, but every day and even every hour either among many others or alone at home, at school or at work. Are we keeping God’s command to be holy?

God is with His holy people and blesses them: The holy and righteous God never condones sins, unrighteousness and ungodliness (Rom 1:18). When the children of Israel served God and kept His Word, He was with them, blessed them and gave them the victory; but when they sinned against Him, they were cursed and defeated before their enemies. “*Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you. Up, sanctify the people, and say, Sanctify yourselves against tomorrow: for thus saith the LORD God of Israel, There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel: thou canst not stand before thine enemies, until ye take away the accursed thing from among you*” (Josh 7:12-13).

It is better to keep ourselves holy, clean and pure to enjoy God’s presence, support, help, deliverance and blessings.

THOUGHT: I must be holy to enjoy God’s presence and blessings.

PRAYER: Lord, please sanctify me and keep me holy.

TUESDAY, MARCH 3

2 TIMOTHY 2:11-26

2 TIMOTHY 2:21

*"If a man therefore purge
himself from these...
meet for the master's use..."*

BETTER TO KEEP OURSELVES CLEAN AND PURE (3)

God uses clean vessels for His glory: We do not want to drink from dirty cups, but clean cups. Sadly, like the Pharisees, many do not see the real depravity and wickedness of their hearts but deceive themselves by thinking that they are clean and pure, and then despise and condemn others (Luke 18:9-12). Many cannot see the hypocrisy, ungodliness, and unbelief of others, so they admire those who have great credentials and eloquent skills, and blindly follow them and their teaching, preaching and writing, and even vote for them to be their religious leaders. They like to hear what is pleasing to their ears or what makes them feel good. Their leaders are thus proud of their churches and think that God is using them and blessing them and their ministry while they neither truly know God and His Word correctly nor submit themselves to the authority of God and His Word! Jesus still teaches His followers to be discerning, to see the fruit to know the tree so that they would not be deceived by wolves in sheep's clothing (Matt 7:15-20). What about us?

We may be honoured and used by men, but are we used by God? God is holy and pure, so He uses clean and pure vessels unto honour for His glory, but dirty vessels unto dishonour. *"But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work"* (2 Tim 2:20-21). To be used by God, we must purge or thoroughly cleanse ourselves from all sins, self, defilement, unrighteousness and worldliness by Jesus' blood and keep ourselves clean, pure and sanctified unto the Lord.

It is wise to keep ourselves pure always to be used by our holy God, *"the wisdom that is from above is first pure..."* (James 3:17).

THOUGHT: Am I used by God or men?

PRAYER: Lord, please cleanse me and use my life for Thy glory.

BETTER TO KEEP OURSELVES CLEAN AND PURE (4)

As God is holy and pure, we must be holy and pure to enjoy His presence and His blessings, to be used by Him, and to see the Lord when He returns. How can we keep ourselves clean and pure?

Pray to the Lord for His searching and cleansing: We must pray to the Lord to search our hearts so that we may see ourselves in the sight of God and His Holy Word, which is like a mirror (James 1:23-24), and then ask Him to cleanse us thoroughly by our Saviour Jesus Christ’s precious blood. *“Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting”* (Ps 139:23-24). *“Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin”* (Ps 51:2). *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9). Do we do that every day?

Separate ourselves from unclean things: We cannot keep ourselves clean and pure if we touch unclean things and live in an unclean environment. That is why God has commanded us to be separate. *“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty”* (2 Cor 6:17-18). Those who are against Biblical Separation neither truly know God’s holiness nor seriously observe God’s commandment! They like to hear and talk about God’s grace and love, but not God’s holiness! We must not take God’s grace for granted and abuse Jesus’ precious blood by embracing sinful lusts, surfing ungodly websites, attending unbiblical worship, watching worldly movies and dramas, listening to worldly music, going to ungodly places, keeping ungodly friendship, enjoying worldly pleasures, etc. In other words, we must be separate!

THOUGHT: Am I truly separate unto the Lord?

PRAYER: Lord, let me know Thy holiness and keep me separate.

THURSDAY, MARCH 5

1 JOHN 3

1 JOHN 3:3

*“...every man that hath this hope in him
purifieth himself, even as he is pure.”*

BETTER TO KEEP OURSELVES CLEAN AND PURE (5)

Read and obey God's Word: God's Word is like a mirror showing our true face (James 1:23-24) and is like the water which cleanses us (John 15:3, Eph 5:26). Failing to keep God's Word is sin! The more we read and obey God's Word daily, the more God sanctifies us. *“Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth”* (John 17:17). *“Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit...”* (1 Pet 1:22).

Live in God's holy presence by Jesus' blood: God has provided the precious blood of His Son so that we are able to approach Him and have fellowship with Him. Thus, it is our fault if we fail to keep a constant fellowship with God. *“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin”* (1 John 1:7; cf. 1:9). Let us do as David did: *“I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved”* (Ps 16:8).

Look forward to meeting our Saviour Jesus Christ: The blessed hope of keeping ourselves clean and pure is to meet our Saviour Jesus. *“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure”* (1 John 3:2-3). Do you want to see God and meet your Saviour Jesus? *“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord”* (Heb 12:14). We must keep ourselves clean and pure and daily wash our spiritual robes — our conduct and life — in the blood of the Lamb. *“... These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb”* (Rev 7:14).

THOUGHT: Failing to follow holiness will mean that I shall not see the Lord.

PRAYER: Lord, please sanctify me through Thy Word each day.

BETTER TO HAVE GOD’S PRESENCE (1)

No people on earth have received God’s Word directly spoken to them like the people of Israel. Do you want to hear God speaking to you? God still speaks to us through His written Word, the Holy Scriptures, and through His living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. *“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds”* (Heb 1:1-2). Many are still not satisfied with God’s written Word and living Word. They want to hear God speaking directly to them. They fail to acknowledge how great, holy, and glorious God is! When God spoke directly to the people of Israel to give them the Ten Commandments, what did they say? They said to Moses, *“Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die”* (Exod 20:19). *“Lest we die”* tells us that they were so frightened and trembling that they could not stand God’s direct living and mighty oracle. We must thank God for His grace and mercy and should be satisfied with His written Word and living Word—reading, meditating, studying, keeping, practising, and living by it, and by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Many have challenged that if they see God, they will believe. God has graciously sent His only begotten Son to reveal Himself to mankind. Jesus says, *“If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him”* (John 14:7). Did the Jews believe in God and fear Him when they saw Jesus Christ and heard God’s Word directly spoken to them through Jesus? No! Most of them despised Him, rejected Him, and agreed to crucify Him! Thus, we should never think that if we see God directly and hear God’s oracle, we will believe. The genuine and saving faith in God and His Word must be a gift from God alone (Eph 2:8). We must thank God that only by His grace can we know, treasure, and believe in Him and His Word.

THOUGHT: Thank God for His written Word and His living Word!

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for Thy gift of faith to believe in Thee.

SATURDAY, MARCH 7

PSALM 16

PSALM 16:8

*"I have set the LORD
always before me..."*

BETTER TO HAVE GOD'S PRESENCE (2)

Moses did not dare to challenge God but just humbly prayed to see God's glory, and God said, *"Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live"* (Exod 33:20), and God graciously let Moses see His *"back parts"* (v 23).

God is holy, and sin has separated sinful men from God's holy presence, so they can never see God with their sinful hearts. God's Word confirms: *"No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him"* (John 1:18). Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, had to come to reveal God to mankind and said, *"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God"* (Matt 5:8). We must thank God that we can have a pure heart through the Lord Jesus Christ's blood-shedding death, His resurrection and His intercession. *"Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us"* (Rom 8:34). He *"loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood"* (Rev 1:5).

Once we have been saved and born again, we can see God's presence everywhere with our spiritual eyes like David: *"Thou hast beset me behind and before...whither shall I flee from thy presence?"* (Ps 139:5-7). When Elisha's servant saw a great Syrian army surrounding them, he panicked and cried, *"Alas, my master! how shall we do?"* (2 Kings 6:15). But Elisha did not panic at all. He said, *"Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them"* (v 16). Then Elisha prayed to God to open his servant's eyes, and he could see *"the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha"* (v 17). Although we cannot see the Lord with our physical eyes, we can see and enjoy His presence with our spiritual eyes (1 Pet 1:8).

THOUGHT: See God with a pure heart and spiritual eyes in Christ!

PRAYER: Lord, open my eyes to see Thy presence everywhere.

BETTER TO HAVE GOD'S PRESENCE (3)

Moses realised that God's precious presence was most important and vital for him and his ministry and his people. He said to the Lord, *"If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence"* (Exod 33:15). And he was satisfied and secured when God promised, *"My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest"* (Exod 33:14). This was not because of Moses or his people but because of God's grace alone: *"for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name... I...will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy"* (vv 17, 19). We should never be proud and think that we have God's presence because of who we are or what we have done or because we are better than others. It is by God's grace and mercy alone that we are drawn to Him and are given faith to believe in Him and to see His presence. Thus, we must always acknowledge and appreciate God's grace and presence.

"There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? LORD, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us" (Ps 4:6). *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me"* (Ps 23:4). *"If God be for us, who can be against us?"* (Rom 8:31). If the Lord is with us and for us, we have all we need—His presence, His guidance, His protection, His provision, His victory, and His comfort, peace, joy and strength. How can the people on earth see the difference between them and God's children? Through God's presence! Although we are not as rich, intelligent, skilful, popular, and famous as many others, we still have what they do not have—God's presence and all His spiritual blessings! Shall we not count all things but loss to know and win Christ and be found in Him (Phil 3:8-9)? Jesus promised, *"I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen"* (Matt 28:20). May God help us to enjoy all the precious blessings of His presence with us!

THOUGHT: Regard all things but loss to maintain God's presence!

PRAYER: Lord, help me to appreciate Thy presence.

MONDAY, MARCH 9

1 JOHN 1

1 JOHN 1:7

*“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light,
... the blood of Jesus Christ his Son
cleanseth us from all sin.”*

BETTER TO HAVE GOD’S PRESENCE (4)

We must thank God for the precious promise of the Lord Jesus Christ that He will be with us *“always, even unto the end of the world.”* If you are not sure of Jesus’ presence, just sincerely welcome Him into your heart and life as your Saviour, your Lord and your King: Jesus says, *“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me”* (Rev 3:20).

As we are still living in this sinful and hostile world, Satan will use many things to distract us and to draw us away from the precious presence of the Lord. Thus, before picking up a newspaper or magazine, reading an article, listening to some music, turning on the TV, surfing the Internet, or going out with friends, etc, we must make sure that God’s holy presence is still with us; otherwise, just stop what we are doing! As God is holy, and sin will separate us from His presence, we really need Jesus’ precious blood to continuously cleanse us to maintain His blessed presence and fellowship moment by moment wherever we are. *“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin”* (1 John 1:7). Thank God for providing Jesus’ precious blood for us to maintain our fellowship with Him in His light! Thus, it is our fault if we fail to maintain God’s presence and fellowship. Do we really desire God and His presence above all? *“Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee”* (Ps 73:25). May God help us practise living in His holy presence through Jesus Christ’s precious blood wherever we are—at home, at school, at work, at church, at play or in the streets—to enjoy His peace, joy and spiritual blessings. *“I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved... in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore”* (Ps 16:8, 11).

THOUGHT: Am I enjoying the Lord’s blessed presence now?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to treasure Thy blessed presence above all.

TUESDAY, MARCH 10

1 CORINTHIANS 1:17-31

1 CORINTHIANS 3:19

*“For the wisdom of this world
is foolishness with God.”*

BETTER TO GET WISDOM (1)

We thank God for creating us in His image and granting us not only a conscience, a will, and a capacity to worship but also wisdom, intelligence, creative mind, power of reasoning and judgment, and various skills, with which some can be scientists, researchers, inventors, philosophers, doctors, engineers, musicians, or chefs, etc. Sadly, not many acknowledge God by thanking Him and glorifying Him.

God’s Word tells us about human and sensual wisdom, about worldly and earthly wisdom, about devilish wisdom and about divine wisdom or wisdom from above. It is dangerous to deceive oneself by thinking that he is wise when he is actually foolish before God! Most people think that they are wise enough to make decisions. They usually think that their decision is wise, their way is wise, and their plan is wise. Many have human and worldly wisdom and may be highly respected as scholars and philosophers, but if they trust in themselves and deny God their Creator and Maker, they are just foolish before God (Ps 14:1; Rom 1:21-25). Many believe and follow human religions and the philosophies of this world, and they think that they are wise, but human or worldly teachings are not the Truth and are unable to save them, to transform their sinful hearts or bring them to Heaven! *“For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God...”* (1 Cor 3:19; cf 1 Cor 1:21).

Many desire to be wise, not according to God’s way, but according to Satan’s or the world’s way. They are like Eve, who fell into Satan’s trap by *“a tree to be desired to make one wise”* (Gen 3:6); and in the end she was not wise at all, but was cursed! Many think that they are wise when they tell lies or use corrupt means to gain the world and climb up the ladder of power and fame. *“But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish”* (James 3:14-15). What about us?

THOUGHT: Am I truly wise before God?

PRAYER: Lord, grant me Thy wisdom to live wisely.

BETTER TO GET WISDOM (2)

It is vital for us to have true and divine wisdom from God, so that we may know Him and His Truth and apply His Truth in our lives. *“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace”* (James 3:17-18). Would you rather choose God’s wisdom, which is much better than gold and the whole world? *“How much better is it to get wisdom than gold! and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver!”* (Prov 16:16).

Many great, wise and famous people of the world are not wise at all before God because they cannot keep themselves *“first pure.”* Thus, no matter how wise humans and human words are, they cannot make us wise to know God, to understand God’s Truth, to be saved, to overcome sins and temptations, to serve God or to do His Word (1 Cor 1:20-21). We should neither trust in ourselves and men nor seek wisdom from men. *“Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!”* (Isa 5:21). We have to seek God and turn to God and His Word for wisdom as only God and His Word are wise and the source of all true wisdom. *“The LORD by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens”* (Prov 3:19; cf. Jer 51:15). *“Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his”* (Dan 2:20; Rom 11:33). *“... Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God”* (1 Cor 1:24). The Holy Spirit is *“the spirit of wisdom and understanding”* (Isa 11:2). God’s Word is the word of wisdom, *“the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus”* (2 Tim 3:15). We must come to God Himself and receive Him and His Word as our divine wisdom!

THOUGHT: Only God and His Word are the sources of all wisdom.

PRAYER: Lord, help me seek Thee and Thy Word for true wisdom.

BETTER TO GET WISDOM (3)

How can we get God’s wisdom? *“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”* (1 Cor 2:14). The natural man is the unsaved man. No matter how smart, wise and intelligent he is according to the world, he can never know and understand spiritual things! You must be born again to have wisdom from above to see and understand spiritual things. *“... Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God”* (John 3:3).

Appreciate God’s truth and wisdom and buy them: Only when we see the great value of divine wisdom will we count all things but loss to get God’s wisdom and blessings. *“Happy is the man that findeth wisdom...”* (Prov 3:13). *“Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom...”* (Prov 4:7). Many still love and seek gold, rubies and worldly wealth rather than God and His Word, the source of true wisdom! They fail to realise that all the gold, rubies and wealth of the world can neither give them eternal life nor deliver them from the eternal Lake of Fire! What about us? *“How much better is it to get wisdom than gold!...”* (Prov 16:16). *“For wisdom is better than rubies...”* (Prov 8:11). *“He that getteth wisdom loveth his own soul...”* (Prov 19:8). Many turn to their resources and worldly means and methods to get success in their life, career, business and even ministry! It is unwise not to turn to God and His Word as *“except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain”* (Ps 127:1)! What about us? *“Wisdom is better than weapons of war...”* (Eccles 9:18; cf. 7:19). *“For wisdom is a defence...”* (Eccles 7:12). Are we willing to pay any cost, even our time, our energy, our lives to seek God and His Word to *“buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding”* (Prov 23:23)?

THOUGHT: It is better to get true wisdom from God and His Word!

PRAYER: Lord, help me to appreciate and highly value Thy wisdom.

BETTER TO GET WISDOM (4)

Read, keep and do God's Word: God used Moses to instruct His people: *“Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me....Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding...”* (Deut 4:5-6). *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom...”* (Col 3:16; Prov 8:33), and *“the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple”* (Ps 19:7). *“And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus”* (2 Tim 3:15). It is foolish to ignore God's Word or to have a low view of God's Word! Sadly, many just blindly follow their religious leaders or “scholars” who do not truly tremble at God's Word with their trust and submission, but even dare to doubt, question and criticise God's Word and attack those believers who humbly trust in God's divinely inspired and perfectly preserved Word of God. The Lord says, *“... to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word”* (Isa 66:2). What about us?

Once we doubt God's Word, we shall not have strength and wisdom to carefully keep God's Word to the jot and tittle. Is it wise to do so? Definitely not! The Lord Jesus confirms, *“Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock”* (Matt 7:24). God commands us to *“buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding.”* To buy something we must pay a price for it. We cannot buy God's wisdom with gold or silver or with anything in this world. To buy God's truth and wisdom, we just have to spend more time with God in prayer and in the study of His Word and then carefully keep and obey God's Word. The more we read and keep God's Word, the more wisdom we can get from the Lord and His Word, and the firmer the foundation we will have to build our spiritual house!

THOUGHT: Am I building my house upon the rock or the sand?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to highly value and keep Thy Word.

BETTER TO GET WISDOM (5)

Fear God and depart from sin and evil: Many do not fear God at all, and they think that they are wise when they deny God and follow evolutionism and human philosophies, but it is foolish to do so before God (Ps 14:1). Many enjoy living in sin and worldly pleasures without any fear of God! However, *“Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding”* (Job 28:28; cf. Ps 111:10; Prov 9:10). Thus, we must *“Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil”* (Prov 3:7; 14:16), and *“the wisdom that is from above is first pure”* (James 3:17). Do we truly fear God and wisely keep ourselves pure and clean from sins, selfishness, worldliness and unbiblical teachings? Doing so is wise before God!

Diligently make use of time: Many just waste their time on vain things, and it is unwise to do so. We do not know how long we shall live on earth. Today may be the last day of our lives, *“so teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom”* (Ps 90:12). *“Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time”* (Col 4:5). *“Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise”* (Prov 6:6). We have wasted a lot of time on vain things already. Now we ought to redeem the time to live for God and His Word and His Kingdom.

Humbly pray to God: *“Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise”* (1 Cor 3:18; Rom 12:16; Prov 11:2). Thank God for willingly and generously giving wisdom to those who humbly ask of Him in faith. *“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him”* (James 1:5). *“For the LORD giveth wisdom...”* (Prov 2:6). Do we wisely seek God and humbly pray to Him for wisdom in all things we do?

THOUGHT: Do I fear God, redeem the time and pray for wisdom?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to fear Thee and grant me Thy wisdom.

BETTER TO GET WISDOM (6)

Submit to the Holy Spirit: Many are deceiving themselves by thinking that they are filled with the Holy Spirit in "speaking in tongues" and "prophesying" and performing "miracles" in Jesus' name whereas they neither truly fear God, nor carefully keep God's Word nor depart from sin, worldliness and evil! They will be shocked when Jesus comes and says to them, *"I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity"* (Matt 7:23). The Holy Spirit is *"the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD"* (Isa 11:2). If we submit ourselves to the Holy Spirit, He is able to fill us with His wisdom and the fear of God. Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, so the enemies *"were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake"* (Acts 6:3, 10). Paul's prayer for believers in Ephesus must be ours as well. *"That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him...be filled with the Spirit"* (Eph 1:17; 5:18).

Walk closely with the Lord and keep a constant fellowship with Him: In the Lord Jesus *"are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"* (Col 2:3; cf, 1 Cor 1:30). Jesus Christ Himself is our wisdom. Having Him, we have God's wisdom; and without Him, we have no wisdom. It is wise to keep a constant fellowship with the Lord like the branches with the vine. God's Word instructs us: *"He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed"* (Prov 13:20). Thus, it is wise for us to keep company with our Lord Jesus Christ and with wise believers who truly fear God and keep God's Word and join them in their worship services, prayer meetings and church camps, etc. It is unwise to make friends with the ungodly or to worship with those who do not truly fear God and honour God's Word as *"evil communications corrupt good manners"* (1 Cor 15:33).

THOUGHT: Do I submit to the Holy Spirit and walk after Him?

PRAYER: Lord, fill me with Thy Spirit of wisdom and fear of God.

BETTER TO BE CONTENTED (1)

We must thank God for granting us His Word so that we may have wisdom to make better choices in life. God’s Word teaches us to choose contentment with quietness, rest and peace rather than the luxurious life with travail, vexation, hatred, strife or contention.

God’s Word of wisdom says, “*Better is an handful with quietness, than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit*” (Eccles 4:6). It is better to have enough of what we need with quietness, peace and rest, than the abundance of materialism with much labour, effort, trouble, hardship, stress, and competition with a heavy and striving heart—no peace, no joy, no rest at all! Some do their business successfully, but they are not contented with what they have earned. They expand their business with more and more branches. What is the outcome? They have more wealth but no rest, no peace, no time for their souls and spiritual life, no time for their families, no time for God their Creator, no time for God’s Word, etc. This is not wise at all because they may gain the whole world, but they lose their souls in the eternal Lake of Fire. Then all they have gained is just vanity.

When you are offered two jobs—one with a high salary but with more stress and more time-consuming work, and the other with a lower salary but with peace and more time to read God’s Word and to serve the Lord—which one would you choose? God’s Word will give you wisdom to choose the latter. “*Better is an handful with quietness, than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit*” (Eccles 4:6). That is not laziness but contentment. You still work hard to support yourself and your loved ones, but you also treasure God’s presence, Word, truth, and wisdom above all the temporal things of the world. Truly, “*godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out*” (1 Tim 6:6-7).

THOUGHT: It is great gain to be content with God’s provision.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be content with what Thou hast given me.

TUESDAY, MARCH 17

PROVERBS 21:1-19

PROVERBS 15:17

*“Better is a dinner of
herbs where love is...”*

BETTER TO BE CONTENTED (2)

What about your food and meals? Many are worried about what they eat and drink, and many others like to eat delicious food and complain about simple food or food that do not meet their taste. Many just go to have delicious meals when they are invited regardless of the ungodly or worldly atmosphere of the gathering. What about you? God’s Word will give us wisdom to choose love and peace no matter how simple the meal is. *“Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith”* (Prov 15:17). *“Better is a dry morsel, and quietness therewith, than an house full of sacrifices with strife”* (Prov 17:1). It is not wrong to have delicious meals when God has given them to us to enjoy with thanksgiving. But we must not put so much of our hearts into them that we will worry or complain when we do not have them. Or if we have to compromise our good testimony to sit together with the ungodly in order to partake of such meals. The right attitude is to eat and drink and *“do all to the glory of God”* (1 Cor 10:31).

What about your accommodation? Many like to stay in a big luxurious mansion and like to get married to someone who is wealthy with a big house, but they fail to see the much more important matter, i.e. the person they are living with. They will have no peace or rest if they stay with ungodly, worldly and contentious people. God’s Word will give us wisdom to choose peace and rest no matter how simple the place is. *“It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling (contentious) woman in a wide house... It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman”* (Prov 21:9, 19). It is not wrong to live in a big house if God wills it, but we must have more concern for the spiritual quality of the people who are living in that house. Are your parents and siblings saved and born again? What about your spouse and children? Many just focus on their jobs, business, or their children’s education and fail to focus on their spiritual life! Consequently, their house is not a happy and blessed home! What about us?

THOUGHT: God’s presence is more important than food and house.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to treasure Thy presence above all.

BETTER TO BE CONTENTED (3)

The problem lies with the covetous hearts of men who are not contented with what they have. They want more money, more property, more wealth, more modern and luxurious lifestyle, more pleasures and entertainment, etc, to enjoy their lives! They spend so much time, efforts and energy in what they love to pursue that they have no time for God, the Giver of all blessings and for God’s Word, Source of all truth and wisdom! Disappointed in the end, they will find out that no one and nothing in this world can truly make their hearts happy or satisfied for long. Despite all his fame, wisdom, success, achievements, riches and wealth, King Solomon bitterly said, *“I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit,...He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity”* (Eccles 2:11; 5:10). Do you believe this truth?

If we love anything in this world, we shall not be satisfied even when we have it because our hearts are still empty. A person may think that he will be happy and contented after getting married. But after marriage, his heart is still empty because the life-partner cannot enter and fill his empty heart! A person may think that he will be happy and contented after getting a PhD degree, a hi-tech gadget, a new car, a nice house, etc. But after that he is still not contented because the degree, gadget, car or house is still outside his heart! That is why we must deal with our empty hearts with God’s presence, grace, love, joy and life first. It is not wrong to have a life-partner, a degree, a gadget, a car or a house, etc. But to be truly contented, we must seek God, His salvation, His righteousness, and His kingdom first (Matt 6:33). Jesus Christ says, *“Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst...”* (John 4:13-14). Do you still thirst after the things of this world?

THOUGHT: Only God the Creator is able to satisfy my empty heart.

PRAYER: Lord, fill my empty heart with Thy presence and joy.

BETTER TO BE CONTENTED (4)

Be not deceived by worldly values and materialism: Many lead a miserable life with bitterness and hurts because of their covetousness. *“But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare...For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred (gone astray) from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows”* (1 Tim 6:9-10). Money is necessary, but it is not everything. Money is necessary but the love of money is the root of all evil. It is a great escape from sorrows and destruction when we are contented with what God has given to us. As the world and everything in it, even our physical life, our life partner, our loved ones, our treasures and property will pass away, and we can bring nothing with us (1 Tim 6:7), we must take care of our spiritual life, invest our lives for eternity and be prepared to meet the Lord. Then surely we shall not regret or be ashamed when our Lord comes (2 Pet 3:11; 1 John 2:28).

Know and appreciate the Lord Himself most: When we have known and experienced that the Lord is all we need, it is easy for us to count all things but loss or rubbish (Phil 3:8). *“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain”* (Phil 1:21). Many have given up their faith and stopped following the Lord and His Word because they underestimated the true value of the Lord Jesus and were attracted by worldly values, comforts and pleasures like many of Jesus’ disciples (John 6:66), Judas Iscariot (Matt 26:14-15) or Demas who *“loved this present world”* (2 Tim 4:10)! What about us?

Trust in the Lord and His loving care: Our Lord Jesus Christ teaches us to trust in God’s loving care day by day, praying to Him, *“Give us this day our daily bread”* (Matt 6:11). Why? Our sovereign and caring God already knows what we need (Matt 6:31-33), and He wants us to trust in His loving care each day, *“Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you”* (1 Pet 5:7).

THOUGHT: It is better to trust and follow the Lord each day.

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for Thy grace and loving care each day.

BETTER TO BE CONTENTED (5)

Learn to be content with what God has given to us: By God’s grace and strength, we need to learn to be contented in all situations like Paul, who encouraged us, *“I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me”* (Phil 4:11-13). Then, *“having food and raiment let us be therewith content”* (1 Tim 6:8) and *“in every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you”* (1Thess 5:18). No more complaining or murmuring. What about us?

Follow Jesus Christ with godliness and contentment: Let us follow our Lord Jesus Christ, our perfect example, and be like Him, who humbly came into this world to give His life to carry out God’s work of salvation for mankind. Jesus was willing to become poor (2 Cor 8:9), saying, *“The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head”* (Matt 8:20). Jesus never had any purpose to gain the things of the world, which Satan painted so nice, attractive and glorious to tempt Him, and Jesus defeated Satan with God’s Word, saying, *“Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve”* (Matt 4:10). Jesus knew that He would live and serve God on earth for a short time and then go back to His Father. So, He did not attract the multitude by wealth, miracles, pleasant-to-the-ear messages, or a big cathedral, but He faithfully taught God’s Word although to many *“this is an hard saying; who can hear it?”* (John 6:60). This world was not Jesus’ home, and He spent His time and effort to train His disciples to faithfully continue God’s work on earth after His departure. What about us? Do we follow our Lord Jesus? *“He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked”* (1 John 2:6).

THOUGHT: Do I follow Jesus’ example and learn to be content?

PRAYER: Lord, please transform me to be like Thee day by day.

BETTER TO BE DISCERNING (1)

We are living in the end times with false Christs and false prophets (Matt 24:24), false teachers (2 Pet 2:1), false apostles (2 Cor 11:13), and false brethren (Gal 2:4). Many are unaware that they are deceived by these false “servants” of God with their false “teachings, doctrines and beliefs” thinking that they are serving God and following His Word! It is so dangerous! The Lord Jesus Christ warns us, *“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves”* (Matt 7:15). May the Lord help us to have a discerning heart, eye and ear so that we may be able to discern not only what is right or wrong but also what is truth or falsehood, and what is from the Lord or from man or from Satan.

This command is in the present tense and in the active voice, denoting, “Keep on beware of false prophets.” This requires constant alertness and caution. Sadly, many so-called “Christians” and “servants” of God nowadays have ignored the Lord Jesus’ warning, and they are compromising to please men and to gain the world! They do not mind standing together with liberals, modernists, new-evangelicals, and leaders of other faiths to “pray” to God for peace, love, unity and harmony in this cursed world with their ecumenical mindsets!

The Lord Jesus tells us that these false prophets come to us in *“sheep’s clothing”*—pretending to be nice, friendly, naïve, gentle, kind, and lovely like sheep and like God’s children and servants to hide their selfish motives and their ungodly and evil hearts as *“inwardly they are ravening wolves.”* Sooner or later, their true colours and nature will be exposed. *“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked...”* (Jer 17:9). True sheep will follow the Lord Jesus *“for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers”* (John 10:4-5). What about us?

THOUGHT: I must not be naïve but discerning among wolves!

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be discerning and cautious always.

BETTER TO BE DISCERNING (2)

How can we know and recognise false prophets? The Lord Jesus Christ teaches us to pay attention to their fruits. “*Ye shall know them by their fruits... Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them*” (Matt 7:16, 20). False prophets are not saved and born again, so they are still enslaved to their sinful nature like the corrupt or evil tree, which can never produce any good fruit, “*a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit... neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit*” (vv 17-18). What are the fruits of false prophets? We must carefully observe and examine their beliefs and doctrines, their saying, preaching, teaching and writing, their conduct and behaviour, their goals, etc., and then compare them with our Lord Jesus Christ, with His true servants and with His Word.

Compare false prophets with the Lord Jesus and His true servants: The Lord Jesus lived a holy and godly life and faithfully served God the Father perfectly according to His Father's will on earth to set a perfect example for His servants and children to follow (John 13:15). So “*he that saith he abideth in him (Jesus) ought himself also so to walk, even as he (Jesus) walked*” (1 John 2:6). True servants and children of the Lord Jesus Christ must walk as He walked, live as He lived, serve as He served, and have the same mind, motive, and purpose as He had. There is no other option. We must not compromise or lower God's standard.

One question we need to ask is: Are they God's children? A person who wants to serve God must first be saved and born again to be God's child. The Lord Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, and His servants and children must be born again. “*Ye must be born again*” (John 3:7). Without being born again, a preacher, a pastor, or a bible college professor can never be God's true servant and child.

THOUGHT: God's true servant must be a truly born-again believer.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to compare myself and others with Thee.

BETTER TO BE DISCERNING (3)

Other questions we must ask are as follows:

Are they being called and anointed by God? If a true child of God desires to be a pastor, *“he desireth a good work”* (1 Tim 3:1). However, he must keep praying for God’s will and guidance until he knows for sure that God has called him and wants him to serve God. Jesus’ apostles had to be called and chosen by Him (Matt 10:1-4). The apostle Paul was *“called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God”* (1 Cor 1:1). The prophet Jeremiah was called and ordained by God before he was born (Jer 1:5). In Jeremiah’s days, false prophets prophesied in the name of the LORD to deceive many, and God revealed their true colours (Jer 14:14).

Are they God-centred and Christ-centred ministers? Jesus humbly depended on His Father, sought and did His Father’s will and not His own will, pleased His Father and not men, glorified His Father alone, and finished His Father’s work (John 5:30; 6:38; 8:29; 17:4). Paul did the same. *“For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord”* (2 Cor 4:5), and *“if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ”* (Gal 1:10). Jesus’ purpose is to save sinners and to bring them to God the Father alone (John 14:6). Paul’s purpose was to bring sinners to the Lord Jesus Christ alone (1 Tim 1:15). What about the false prophets and their ministry? Their evil fruit is their man-centred ministry, preaching, and worship, trying to attract people to themselves and to their own group, church or organisation, to glorify men and please men, etc. It is more deceiving when these false prophets perform miracles to draw many to themselves! But they will be rejected when Jesus comes (Matt 7:23).

THOUGHT: God’s true servant must be called through His will.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to recognise Thy voice and Thy true servants.

BETTER TO BE DISCERNING (4)

Compare false prophets and their messages with God’s Word: God has given us His Word as His Truth to live by, trust in and follow as well as to discern what is true and false based on it.

Are their lives and ministries Word-centred? A prophet is a spokesman of God. He is called to speak God’s Word faithfully without any addition or subtraction. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Great Prophet, and He lived, served God, preached and taught according to God’s will and Word. Jesus never contradicts God’s Word, never criticises nor casts doubt on God’s Word, but lives by God’s Word (Matt 4:4). He says, *“whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak”* (John 12: 50). Paul did the same, saying, *“when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God”* (1 Thess 2:13). False prophets will fail to live according to God’s Word, to preach God’s Word faithfully and to promote God’s Word alone in their preaching, teaching and writing. They usually choose a few verses in the Bible that suit their own will to support their goals, beliefs and doctrines. Thus, their doctrines can never be biblical. Naïve followers do not know that these false prophets are preaching a different Christ, a different Gospel and a different Spirit (2 Cor 11:4)!

Are they caring shepherds or hirelings? The Lord Jesus Christ is the good Shepherd who gave His life for His sheep (John 10:11). Paul cared for the spiritual well-being of the believers, saying, *“I seek not yours, but you... And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved”* (2 Cor 12:14-15), but these false prophets are just hirelings, and *“through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you”* (2 Pet 2:3). Sooner or later, their ambitions for fame, wealth, power and worldly values will be exposed. We must be discerning. *“Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.”*

THOUGHT: God’s true servant must live for God and God’s people.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to live for Thee and for Thy people.

BETTER TO BE HUMBLE (1)

Although we are sinful human beings, we do not want to support those who are proud and arrogant. Then, how much more the holy, righteous, sovereign and most high God will be against proud and arrogant sinful creatures! God’s Word confirms this truth: “...*God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble*” (James 4:6; 1 Pet 5:5; cf. Prov 15:25).

God’s Word tells us that “*an high look, and a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked, is sin*” (Prov 21:4). Pride or arrogance is sin, and surely, the proud cannot escape God’s punishment or judgment. Lucifer exalted himself to be like God and he was cursed to become Satan and was cast down into the earth (Isa 14:13-15). Eve listened to Satan’s deceptive words and ate the forbidden fruit in order to be “*as gods*” (Gen 3:4-5). Adam also ate that fruit, having listened to his wife’s words instead of God’s Word, and both were cursed. Miriam spoke arrogantly against Moses, God’s servant, and she became leprous, white as snow (Num 12:1-15). King Saul failed to wholeheartedly and carefully obey God’s Word. The Lord left him and Satan troubled him (1 Sam 15:22-23; 16:14-15). David conducted a census of his people with a proud motive, and God sent a pestilence, taking away the lives of 70,000 (2 Sam 24). King Uzziah proudly entered into the temple to burn incense. He became leprous until his death (2 Chron 26:16-21). King Nebuchadnezzar was so proud of his kingdom. He had to dwell with the beasts of the field and ate grass as oxen until he acknowledged the Lord, even the Sovereign Creator (Dan 4:29-37). King Herod arrogantly failed to give God the glory. He was eaten of worms and gave up his spirit (Acts 12:20-23). What about us? Are you proud? Am I proud? It is foolish to be proud, to despise others, and to think that we are better than others. “...*God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.*” The wise attitude is, “*He (Christ) must increase, but I must decrease*” (John 3:30).

THOUGHT: Christ must keep on increasing, and I decreasing.

PRAYER: Lord, keep me humble and help me to exalt Thee alone.

THURSDAY, MARCH 26

LUKE 18:9-17

LUKE 18:14

“...he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”

BETTER TO BE HUMBLE (2)

It is always good and wise to acknowledge God's sovereignty and all our blessings from Him. *“The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up”* (1 Sam 2:7). When we humble ourselves before Him, we shall be blessed as God *“giveth grace unto the humble.”* What are God's blessings to the humble?

Being remembered, regarded and heard: God promises that *“he remembereth them: he forgetteth not the cry of the humble”* (Ps 9:12), and *“LORD, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear”* (Ps 10:17). God does not hear the proud prayer of the Pharisee, but He hears the humble cry of a tax collector, *“God, be merciful to me a sinner”* (Luke 18:9-14). God heard the humble cry of the wicked king Manasseh in his repentance (2 Chron 33:19). Then, no matter what we have done, either good or bad, it is always wise for us to humble ourselves before God to receive His blessings.

Being honoured, respected, lifted up and exalted: The Lord Jesus says: *“every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted”* (Luke 18:14). God's Word tells us that *“before honour is humility”* (Prov 15:33; 18:12), *“By humility and the fear of the LORD are riches, and honour, and life”* (Prov 22:4), and *“Though the LORD be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly...”* (Ps 138:6). Do you want to be honoured and exalted by God? Let us truly humble ourselves before the Lord.

Being comforted and revived by God's presence: *“For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones”* (Isa 57:15). Do you want to be comforted and revived by God? Let us humble ourselves before God.

THOUGHT: What will I be remembered for after I leave this earth?

PRAYER: One life to live on this earth. May I live it for Thee, Lord.

BETTER TO BE HUMBLE (3)

Being blessed with God’s grace and help: *“But he giveth more grace ...giveth grace unto the humble”* (James 4:6; 1 Pet 5:5; Prov 3:34). We have been saved and justified by God’s grace alone, and we still need God’s grace each day to overcome ourselves, trials, Satan’s attacks and temptations. We also need God’s grace each day to love Him and others, to serve Him and others, and to keep His Word. Let us keep on humbling ourselves to obtain His grace always.

Being wise and the greatest: *“When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom”* (Prov 11:2). *“Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven”* (Matt 18:4). Do you want to be wise and great before God? Let us humble ourselves before Him.

Being not destroyed but delivered: The people of Judah forsook their God and sinned against Him, so God allowed the Egyptians to come and oppress them, but *“when the LORD saw that they humbled themselves, ...saying, They have humbled themselves; therefore I will not destroy them, but I will grant them some deliverance...”* (2 Chron 12:7, 12; 32:26). Do you want to escape God’s destruction and have His deliverance? Let us humble ourselves before Him.

Being like the Lord Jesus: The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God and God Himself, *“humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him...”* (Phil 2:8-9). Jesus gave Paul a thorn in the flesh to keep him humble to enjoy His grace and strength (2 Cor 12:7-9), so Paul humbly served like his Master. *“Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears...”* (Acts 20:19). If you are proud and arrogant, you will be cursed and humiliated like Satan, but if you are humble, you will be blessed and exalted like Jesus Christ. Which are you?

THOUGHT: It is better to humble myself than to be humiliated!

PRAYER: Lord, keep me humble to enjoy Thy grace and strength.

BETTER TO BE WATCHFUL (1)

Are we watchful or alert? If we ask others this question, they may be surprised and ask, “Watch for what?” Many just live naively without any watchfulness. They care only for the things of the world but not for their souls! They do not watch what they are saying or doing, or where they go, or what may happen to them. However, we will be very watchful and alert when we are in enemy territory or among wicked people, when we are walking through a mine field or in a jungle full of snakes and fierce animals, when we know that someone is following us, when we are warned that there may be some break-in at night or we may be attacked, when we hold something very precious but fragile, when we handle something very harmful and dangerous—poisonous chemicals, toxic gases, or high-voltage devices. Spiritually speaking, we are living in the enemy territory of Satan, full of snares, traps, deceptions, temptations and spiritual warfare. Sadly, not many are alert, watchful or vigilant.

The more we love our loved ones, the more we watch over them and warn them to be watchful so that they may be safe and sound. God loves us so much that He has warned and commanded us to be watchful for our well-being. In the New Testament, there are at least sixteen commands ordering us to “*watch*” (Matt 24:42; 26:41; 2 Tim 4:5, et al), one command to “*be watchful*” (Rev 3:2) and one to “*be vigilant*” (1 Pet 5:8). God’s true servants must be watchful and watch for the souls of the brethren. “*But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry*” (2 Tim 4:5). “*Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you*” (Heb 13:17). God commands us to be watchful. When we fail to be watchful to ensure that we are on the right track of God’s will and Word, we fail to keep God’s command, and it is sin!

THOUGHT: Am I watchful that I am doing God’s will?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be alert and watchful always.

BETTER TO BE WATCHFUL (2)

The Lord Jesus rebuked the church in Sardis because they were not watchful and failed to realise that they were spiritually dead and their works were not perfect before God. *"I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God"* (Rev 3:1-2). This command is in the present tense, denoting a continuous action, "keep on becoming watchful." Are we watchful now? Here our Lord does not mean our physical alertness, but our spiritual alertness. We have to rise from our sleepy spirit and be spiritually alert to:

Make sure that our works are perfect before God (Rev 3:2). Our works may seem perfect before men, but might not be perfect before God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. An employee must be alert and focus on his work before his boss or in the presence of his boss. He cannot be sleepy or sleeping before his boss! How about our work before the Lord our God as His servants? Are we watchful in the Lord's presence and doing everything according to His will for Him and for His glory with all our heart and love and fear? If not, we are dying spiritually before God!

Pray and stand firm in temptations. *"Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak"* (Matt 26:41). When we walk on the land of the enemies full of snares, traps and mines, we must watch our steps to make sure that we are safe. If not, we are not truly alive. We are living in this world full of compromise, deception, temptations, false prophets, false teachers, and false teachings. Are we really watchful and prayerful so that we do not fall into the temptations, snares and traps of Satan? If not, we are sleeping or dying spiritually!

THOUGHT: Are my works perfect before God? Be watchful!

PRAYER: Lord, help me to live and serve Thee with a watchful heart.

BETTER TO BE WATCHFUL (3)

Defend ourselves from our spiritual foes, even Satan. *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour”* (1 Pet 5:8). When we see a lion walking around us, should we be sleepy or sleeping? If we are truly alive, we must be watchful and careful. How about our spiritual life? Are we like a naïve and defenceless sheep before Satan, who is like a roaring lion? Are we really watchful and hiding ourselves in our Saviour Jesus Christ and using God’s whole armour including the sword of the Holy Spirit, which is the Word of God, to fight against Satan and defeat him as our Lord Jesus Christ did (Matt 4:1-11)?

Be ready for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. *“Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching... Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not”* (Luke 12:37, 40). When we are informed that tonight a thief will break into our house, can we be sleepy or sleeping? How about our spiritual life? What happens if we fail to be watchful for our Lord’s return? *“...If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee”* (Rev 3:3). If we are not watchful, we shall be ashamed when Christ returns.

We need to be watchful to be prepared for the Lord Jesus Christ’s return. We want to be found ready and pleasing in His sight when He comes for His saints. *“Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man”* (Luke 21:36). Are we watching?

THOUGHT: Be watchful to make sure that I do not miss the rapture!

PRAYER: Lord, help me to watch and prepare to meet Thee any time.

TUESDAY, MARCH 31

2 PETER 1

ECCLESIASTES 7:8

*“Better is the end of a thing
than the beginning thereof...”*

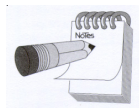
BETTER TO END WELL

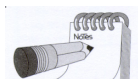
It is not easy to have a good start or a good beginning because it requires much wisdom, time, effort and opportunity, but even having a good start does not always secure a good ending. We have witnessed many who started well in their studies, marriage, project, business, ministry, etc, but not all ended well. Many promising so-called “Christians” started well but did not end well because they did not have a good foundation or a deep root in the Lord Jesus Christ and God’s Word (Matt 13:20-21). We must thank God for His sufficient grace and strength that we may persevere until now despite all the troubles, sufferings, trials, temptations, or persecutions. But what about our future? *“Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit”* (Eccles 7:8).

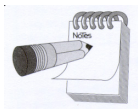
You may wonder why this series of RPG repeats the following again and again: “You must be born again; you must be separate; you must be sanctified; you must die to self; you must humbly depend on and submit to the Lord Jesus Christ and let Christ live in you; you must keep a closer walk with God; you must have a high view of God’s Word, read God’s Word and do it, etc.” Why? Although you may have known all these truths, they are still important reminders to help us live wisely making better choices and to be faithful to the Lord and His Word until the end: *“be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life”* (Rev 2:10). Peter encouraged his readers, *“Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth”* (2 Pet 1:12). We may encounter many other cases and situations in our lives where we need to make a wise decision and a wise choice. We should remember that our good, almighty and sovereign Lord is always ready to help and that His Word and His grace are always sufficient for us. Just turn to the Lord and His Word, wait upon Him, and humbly cry for His help!

THOUGHT: The Lord, His Word and grace can help me end well.

PRAYER: Lord, help me follow Thee and Thy Word until the end.







RPG Subscription Form

To: **Tabernacle Books**

Calvary Pandan B-P Church

201 Pandan Gardens, Singapore 609 337

Tel: (65)-6560 1111 Fax: (65)-6561 1861 Email: rpg@calvarypandan.org

Read Pray Grow (RPG) is a Daily Devotional Guide published quarterly by Calvary Pandan B-P Church and distributed free-of-charge by Tabernacle Books. If you have been blessed by this Devotional Guide, you may wish to subscribe to it for yourself or for your loved ones and friends by filling in the form below.

1. Please send me:

____ years' subscription of ____ copies per issue of RPG

____ years' subscription of ____ copies per issue of Teenz RPG

____ years' subscription of ____ copies per issue of Junior RPG

____ years' subscription of ____ copies per issue of Chinese RPG

starting from month: JAN / APR / JUL / OCT _____ (year)

2. Name: (Dr/Rev/Mr/Mrs/Miss/Mdm/Ms) _____

Address: _____

Country: _____ Postal Code: _____

Tel no.: _____ (H/O) _____ (Mobile)

Email : _____

<i>Postage & handling cost for 4 issues per year</i>					
<i>no. of copies per issue</i>	<i>Singapore</i>	<i>Malaysia/Brunei</i>	<i>Asia</i>	<i>Other Countries</i>	
	<i>Local Mail</i>	<i>Airmail</i>	<i>Airmail</i>	<i>Surface Mail</i>	<i>Airmail</i>
<i>1 copy</i>	<i>S\$6.00</i>	<i>S\$8.00</i>	<i>S\$15.00</i>	<i>S\$8.00</i>	<i>S\$20.00</i>
<i>2 copies</i>	<i>S\$7.00</i>	<i>S\$12.00</i>	<i>S\$23.00</i>	<i>S\$12.00</i>	<i>S\$31.00</i>
<i>5 copies</i>	<i>S\$10.00</i>	<i>S\$23.00</i>	<i>S\$50.00</i>	<i>S\$24.00</i>	<i>S\$67.00</i>
<i>10 copies</i>	<i>S\$15.00</i>	<i>S\$40.00</i>	<i>S\$93.00</i>	<i>S\$40.00</i>	<i>S\$130.00</i>

Love Gift: RPG ministry welcomes love gifts from readers to help meet the cost of publishing and distribution. The ministry also sends these devotional guides to readers in poor countries. Hence, your generous support is much needed and greatly appreciated.

"Freely ye have received, freely give." (Matthew 10:8)

Enclosed is my love gift of S\$

International subscribers please make payment by Bank Draft in Singapore Dollars drawn on a Singapore Bank. For foreign cheques, please add S\$25.00 for bank charges.

*Please make all payments payable to: **Calvary Pandan B-P Church***



读祷长订阅单

To: Tabernacle Books

Calvary Pandan B-P Church

201 Pandan Gardens, Singapore 609 337

电话:(65)-6560 1111 传真:(65)-6561 1861 电邮:rpg@calvarypandan.org

《读祷长》（读经、祷告、长进）每日灵修辅助本是班丹加略定期出版的免费季刊。如果阅读了这灵修辅助本而获益，你只要填妥以下的表格，就可以为你自己或你的朋友订阅这季刊。

1. 请寄:

____ 份 ____ 年数量之英文版读祷长
 ____ 份 ____ 年数量之英文少年版读祷长
 ____ 份 ____ 年数量之英文小学生版读祷长
 ____ 份 ____ 年数量之中文版读祷长

从____年 一月/四月/七月/十月 起分发

2. 姓名: (Dr/Rev/Mr/Mrs/Miss/Mdm/Ms) _____

地址: _____

国家: _____ 邮区: _____

电话: _____ (H/O) _____ (手提电话)

电邮: _____

一年四期的邮费及运送费

每期的数量	新加坡	马来西亚/汶来	亚洲	其他国家	
	本地邮费	空运	空运	平邮	空运
1 份	S\$6.00	S\$8.00	S\$15.00	S\$8.00	S\$20.00
2 份	S\$7.00	S\$12.00	S\$23.00	S\$12.00	S\$31.00
5 份	S\$10.00	S\$23.00	S\$50.00	S\$24.00	S\$67.00
10 份	S\$15.00	S\$40.00	S\$93.00	S\$40.00	S\$130.00

爱心奉献: 读祷长事工欢迎读者的爱心奉献以资助印刷与运送费。这些灵修辅助本也分送到一些贫穷国家的读者。因此, 我们需要您的慷慨奉献与帮助, 并谨此献上感谢。“你们白白地得来, 也要白白地舍去。” (马太福音10:8)

随单送上爱心奉献 S\$

海外订阅可以向新加坡银行以新币兑现银行汇票来付款。

若是海外支票请附加S\$25.00 银行手续费。

支票付款请注明收款人: Calvary Pandan B-P Church

