

January to March 2016

“Making Better Choices in Life” (Part 2)

by

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About the Author



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BETTER TO BE THANKFUL TO GOD

Today is New Year’s Day. We must thank God for seeing us through the past one year. We are safe and sound in His loving care in this troubled world. Some of you may have many things to give thanks to God for, e.g: for His blessings upon your life, your studies, your work, your family and your ministry. *“O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever”* (Ps 136:1). Some of you may have gone through a tough year with difficulties, troubles, illnesses, afflictions and trials. You can still give thanks to the Lord for His all-sufficient grace in helping you to endure and to make you more mature like Job. *“But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold”* (Job 23:10).

We thank God for His precious Word which teaches us how to make better choices in life. Let us continue to apply these truths in our lives for this New Year: better to have a new heart (Ezek 36:26), better to seek God first (Matt 6:33; Isa 55:6), better to trust in God and rely on Him (Ps 118:8-9; John 15:5), better to know God more and more (Phil 3:8; 2 Pet 3:18), better to regard all things but loss and to focus on eternal things (Phil 3:8; 2 Cor 4:18), better to know and to do God’s Word and will (Matt 7:21-25), better to prove what is acceptable to God (Eph 5:10), better to glorify God alone (1 Cor 10:31), better to walk as Jesus walked (1 John 2:6), better to draw nigh to God (James 4:8), better not to be conformed to this world (Rom 12:2), better to do profitable and edifying things (1 Cor 10:23), better to be a servant of Christ alone (Rom 1:1; 6:22), better not to cause others to stumble (Matt 18:7), better to have a good name (Prov 22:1), better to keep ourselves clean and pure (Matt 5:8; 1 John 3:3), better to have God’s presence (Exod 33:15), better to get wisdom (Prov 16:16), better to be contented (1 Tim 6:6), better to be discerning (Matt 7:15), better to be humble (James 4:6), better to be watchful (Luke 12:37), better to end well (Eccles 7:8), and better to be thankful to God always for all things and in all things.

THOUGHT: Failure to give thanks to God is the sin of ingratitude.

PRAYER: O Lord, help me to be thankful to Thee always.

BETTER TO BE THANKFUL TO THE LORD

God commands His human creatures to give thanks to Him, "*O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever*" (Ps 136:1). The command "*Give thanks unto the LORD*" has eight occurrences: 1 Chronicles 16:8, 34; Psalm 105:1; 106:1; 107:1; 118:1, 29; 136:1. Are we giving thanks to the Lord now and always?

It is always good to remember the LORD's name so that we may give thanks, praise and glory to Him. "*Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God*" (Ps 20:7). Why? "*Our help is in the name of the LORD*" (Ps 124:8), and "*The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe*" (Prov 18:10). The LORD, the *Jehovah*, the *I AM THAT I AM* (Exod 3:14), is the self-existent, eternal, unchangeable, faithful, almighty, and supreme God, who is all we need and who is able to faithfully keep His Word, covenants, and promises to His covenant people. When we need His provision, He is *Jehovahjireh* (Gen 22:14), the LORD will provide. When we need His victory, He is *Jehovahnissi* (Exod 17:15), the LORD is our banner of victory. When we need His loving care, He is *Jehovah-rohi*, the LORD is my Shepherd (Ps 23:1). When we need His strength and defence, He is *Jehovah-sabaoth*, the LORD of hosts (Zech 4:6). When we need His righteousness, He is *Jehovah-Tsidkenu*, the Lord of our righteousness (Jer 23:6). When we need His holiness, He is *Jehovah-M'qaddishkhem*, the LORD that sanctifies you (Exod 31:13). When we need His healing, He is *Jehovah-rapha*, the LORD that heals thee (Exod 15:26). When we need His peace, He is *Jehovah-shalom*, the LORD is peace (Judg 6:24). When we need His presence, He is *Jehovah-shammah*, the LORD is there (Ezek 48:35). When we need His salvation, He is our *Jehovah-hoshua* or Joshua, the Saviour Jesus (Isa 45:21; Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21; 2 Pet 3:18). We must give thanks and praise to the LORD always.

THOUGHT: I must be thankful to the LORD, who is all I need.

PRAYER: O LORD, I thank Thee so much for being all I need.

BETTER TO BE THANKFUL TO THE LIVING, TRUE GOD

Giving thanks to the LORD is giving thanks to the living and true God, the Creator and Maker. *"O give thanks unto the God of gods: for his mercy endureth for ever"* (Ps 136:2). When the people of Israel were unfaithful to the LORD, breaking His covenant and law, and turning to idolatry, God sent His prophet Elijah to rebuke them, *"How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD (Jehovah) be God (Elohim), follow him"* (1 Kings 18:21). Elijah challenged 450 false prophets: *"Call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God"* (1 Kings 18:24). The false prophets called on the name of their gods from morning until evening, but there was no answer. However, when Elijah offered the sacrifice and called upon the name of the LORD, *"the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice"* (1 Kings 18:38) and the people fell on their faces and said, *"The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God"* (1 Kings 18:39). The world's "gods" are not the living, true and Creator God.

- (a) The "god" of the theistic evolutionists and followers of false isms is different from the living and true God of the Holy Scriptures although they may confess that they are "Christians" (2 Cor 11:3-4).
- (b) The "gods" of the heathen and human religions, including the "gods" of materialism, pleasures, etc, are false gods. *"For all the gods (elohim) of the nations are idols: but the LORD made the heavens"* (Ps 96:5).
- (c) Angels (Ps 97:7), so-called "gods," are not the Creator and are commanded to worship the living and true God, the Creator.
- (d) Rulers or judges, so-called "gods," are not the Creator and are judged by the living and true God (Ps 82:1).

Thus, when God's Word says, *"O give thanks unto the God of gods,"* we must make sure that we give thanks to the living and true God, the Creator, and acknowledge and exalt Him as our personal God. *"O LORD, thou art my God; I will exalt thee"* (Isa 25:1).

THOUGHT: There is only one living and true God, the Creator.

PRAYER: O LORD, I thank Thee, for Thou art my God the Creator.

BETTER TO BE THANKFUL TO THE LORD OF LORDS

Giving thanks to the LORD, the living and true God, is giving thanks to the Lord of lords. *“O give thanks to the Lord of lords: for his mercy endureth for ever”* (Ps 136:3). Neither any angel nor any human being is the Lord of lords and the King of kings, who is sovereign and reigns over all the angels, all the universe, all the whole earth, all the laws of nature, all the nations, all the events in human history, and over all things. Nothing happens in the world without God’s will and permission. Even a sparrow *“shall not fall on the ground without your Father”* (Matt 10:29). That does not mean the Lord God is the author of all evils, *“for he is an holy God”* (Josh 24:19) and *“for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man”* (James 1:13). Satan and sinful human beings are accountable for all the evils in this world. Acknowledging God’s sovereignty, we give thanks and praise to the almighty and good Lord, who is able to make *“all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose”* (Rom 8:28), and then fear Him and submit ourselves to Him. *“For the LORD your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward”* (Deut 10:17).

We must thank God for sending His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, into the world to die for mankind, to rise again, and is exalted as *“King of kings and Lord of lords”* (1 Tim 6:15; Rev 17:14), and some day, *“every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”* (Phil 2:11). But what about you? Is the Lord Jesus truly your personal Lord and King? Can you also call Him, *“My Lord and my God”* (John 20:28)? If you still believe, think, say, listen to, watch or do whatever you like regardless of the Lord Jesus and His Word, He is not your Lord and King! *“And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?”* (Luke 6:46). You will be rejected when He comes (Matt 7:23; Luke 19:27).

THOUGHT: Is the Lord Jesus truly my Lord and my King?

PRAYER: O Lord, I thank Thee for being my Lord and King.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 5

PSALM 107:1-22

PSALM 107:1

*“O give thanks unto the LORD,
for he is good.”*

BE THANKFUL FOR GOD’S GOODNESS (1)

God commands His human creatures to give thanks to Him for His goodness. *“O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good”* (Ps 136:1). Do you see God’s goodness and give thanks to Him?

Many are living without regard for who God is and what God has done for them and what God expects them to do. God is not in their thoughts, and gratitude to God is not in their mind and heart. They even deny God and argue with Him in their thoughts, sayings, writings, or media products. “If God does exist and if He is really almighty, all-knowing, all-wise, all-just, all-loving and all-good, why are there so many ugly, evil and bad things in this world? Troubles, problems, trials, pain, sorrow, illnesses, physical defects, poverty, sin, envy, hatred, deceit, immorality, covetousness, oppression, injustice, crime, wickedness, terrorism, fighting, war, famine, epidemic, natural disasters, death, etc?” Many others argue that if God does exist, He could not be almighty or all-knowing because He could neither keep Adam and Eve or mankind from sin, nor keep this world in peace, in love and in order.

Failing to see God’s goodness, many are not thankful to their Creator, but even murmur against Him and blaspheme Him and His Name! They have failed to understand that God did not create human beings to be robots, without any ability to make their own choices and decisions. Human beings are neither robots nor evolved from non-living particles and then through millions of years evolved to living things and then to apes, monkeys and human beings! The capacity to reason, to argue, to judge and to make one’s own choice and decision is one of the evidences which proves that human beings were created in God’s image by the almighty, all-wise and all-good God (re: Gen 1:27; 2:7). Do you believe in God’s Truth or human arguments?

THOUGHT: I must turn to and trust in God who alone is good.

PRAYER: O Lord, I thank Thee for Thy goodness.

BE THANKFUL FOR GOD'S GOODNESS (2)

While many do not see God's goodness and good works to give thanks to Him, God's true children do. *"Thou art good, and doest good; teach me thy statutes"* (Ps 119:68). *"Surely the righteous shall give thanks unto thy name"* (Ps 140:13).

Since God created human beings with the capacity to make their own choices and decisions, they are totally accountable and responsible for their own choices and decisions. They can never blame God for their failures or the evil consequences of their choices and decisions. Good and loving parents always love and want their children to be good students and citizens, and will teach and instruct them to love one another, to do what is good and to avoid what is evil, to keep the country's laws, etc. If they fail to obey their parents' instructions but choose to follow bad people, to fight with one another or to indulge themselves in alcohol, drugs and sexual immorality, or to violate the country's laws, they will be punished by the law. Then, can they blame their parents for the pain, the shame, the injuries, the evil diseases or the death penalty? Absolutely not! They have to bear the consequences of their own choices and decisions!

The living and true God of the Holy Scriptures is truly almighty, all-wise, all-knowing and all-good. Having created the heaven and the earth, and everything in it including human beings in six literal twenty-four-hour days, *"God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day"* (Gen 1:31). Truly, *"Thou art good, and doest good."* Sadly, the first human beings, Adam and Eve, failed to obey their good and loving God, but chose to follow the bad, evil, and wicked Deceiver, even Satan, who disguised himself with nice and seductive words, and so Adam and Eve had to bear the consequences of their choice and decision: curse, sin and death (Gen 3; Rom 5:12)! Thus, it is better to be thankful to God for His goodness that we are still alive!

THOUGHT: God alone is good, and all His works are very good.

PRAYER: O Lord, I thank Thee for Thy goodness and good works.

BE THANKFUL FOR GOD’S GOODNESS (3)

Almost everyone likes to be called a good man, a good lady, a good boy, or a good girl. Sadly, due to the totally sinful, depraved and corrupt nature of human beings, they can only try to appear good outwardly while their hearts are not so. God’s Word confirms this: *“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”* (Jer 17:9). Indeed, who can know it? Those who can are those (like Paul) who are convicted by the Holy Spirit and God’s Word and can sincerely confess: *“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing”* (Rom 7:18).

When the rich young man came to Jesus and asked Him, *“Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?”* (Matt 19:16), our Lord Jesus Christ responded with a test for him: *“Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments”* (Matt 19:17). If the rich young man truly believed that Jesus is good, he would have believed that Jesus is God and then kept His commandments, obeyed Him and followed Him. The young man was deceiving himself by thinking that he had kept the commandments since his youth. The Lord Jesus further tested him: *“If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me”* (Matt 19:21). What is the rich young man’s response? He left and failed the test. He failed to see that Jesus is God and failed to love and obey God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength when he did not want to leave everything to follow God (Jesus Christ). He also failed to love his neighbours as himself when he was not willing to obey Jesus’ Word to sell his possessions and give them to the poor. God’s Word confirms: *“there is none that doeth good, no, not one”* (Rom 3:12). God commands us to love Him, worship Him, thank Him, serve Him, trust in Him, and submit to Him and to love our neighbours as ourselves (Matt 22:36-40). Will we obey Him?

THOUGHT: It is better to obey my good God with a thankful heart.

PRAYER: O Lord, only Thou art good. Help me to obey Thee.

BE THANKFUL FOR GOD’S GOODNESS (4)

When someone is good to us, we ought to show our gratitude to him; otherwise, we are being unthankful and ungrateful! As only the Lord our God is good, and He is so good to us, we ought to give thanks and praise to Him, worship Him, serve Him alone, and “*magnify him with thanksgiving*” (Ps 69:30); otherwise, it is sin!

God’s wrath is against the ungodly and the unrighteous, who “*glorified him not as God, neither were thankful... Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator... For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet*” (Rom 1:21, 25-27).

God’s Word shows that homosexuality is an abominable sin. Due to Adam’s failure, human beings have inherited a totally depraved nature whether they like it or believe it or not (Jer 17:9; Rom 8:7). It is serious when the holy and righteous God gives sinners up fully to their own sinful nature, even to homosexuality! Sadly, the conscience of many is so dull that they regard homosexuality as a normal lifestyle! God loves us and He expects us to repent to escape His judgment (re: Rom 2:4). We must hate all sins, including homosexuality, same-sex marriage, etc. We must lovingly share the gospel with those who practise these sins, for they are sinners before God (Rom 3:23). Only God is able to save sinners, and the only way is to turn to the Saviour Jesus in repentance and cry to Him for His deliverance (Matt 19:25-26; Ps 51; Rom 7:24-25). We must share God’s love with others. Will you?

THOUGHT: Giving thanks to God is glorifying God.

PRAYER: O Lord, please help me to glorify Thee with thanksgiving.

BE THANKFUL FOR GOD'S GOODNESS (5)

Since the Lord our God is good, His Word (the Holy Scriptures) is also good (Josh 23:14; Jer 29:10), His will is good (Rom 12:2), His law and commandment is good (Rom 7:12), His doctrine is good (1 Tim 4:6), His gift is good (James 1:17), His work is good (Phil 1:6), His way is good, although narrow it leads to eternal life (1 Kings 8:36; Matt 7:14), and surely His purpose, His plan, His timing, and even His rebukes and chastisements are all good. Above all, God's salvation shows His love, mercy, grace and goodness to mankind (Eph 2:4-5). Thus, what must we do?

(1) Trust God and be thankful for His goodness in all things: *"The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him"* (Nah 1:7). Even when evil or bad things happen, we trust that our good God is able to make all things work together for good to His children (Rom 8:28). Then *"in every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you"* (1 Thess 5:18). Do we?

(2) Worship God with a thankful heart: *"Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations"* (Ps 100:5-6; cf. 107:15; 135:3; 136). Do we?

(3) Patiently seek and wait for God and His good timing to taste His goodness: *"The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD"* (Lam 3:25-26), and *"taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him"* (Ps 34:8), and then *"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever"* (Ps 23:6). Do we?

THOUGHT: I must trust, worship and thank my good God always.

PRAYER: O Lord, Thou art worthy to receive all thanks and glory.

BE THANKFUL FOR GOD'S GOODNESS (6)

(4) Appreciate God's good work in our heart and life with our willing obedience: *"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: ... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure"* (Phil 1:6; 2:12-13). God graciously uses His good Word to transform, renew, regenerate, and sanctify us to be like His Son Jesus Christ. Without God's good work in you and me, we shall be undone for ever! We must obey God with thanks and fear.

(5) Humbly fear God and repent of our sins: *"Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!"* (Ps 31:19). *"Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off"* (Rom 11:22). *"Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?"* (Rom 2:4). We must never abuse or take God's goodness for granted, but we ought to keep ourselves in His goodness with fear, trust, obedience, repentance, and with a thankful heart.

(6) Do not take God's name and goodness in vain: God's third commandment is *"Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain"* (Exod 20:7). It is a serious matter when many just say God's name without any reverence, eg: "My God!" Or "My gosh!" Many think it is fine to say, "My goodness!" but it is seriously wrong because only God is good. *"Blessed be the LORD my strength, ... My goodness, and my fortress; my high tower, and my deliverer; my shield, and he in whom I trust; who subdueth my people under me"* (Ps 144:1-2).

THOUGHT: I must be thankful for God's goodness with reverence.

PRAYER: O Lord, keep me in Thy goodness with thanks and fear.

BE THANKFUL FOR GOD'S MERCY (1)

Psalm 136 has twenty-six verses and every verse repeats the reason why mankind should give thanks to God: *"for his mercy endureth for ever."* Many do not see God's mercy, so they do not humble themselves to give thanks or praise to the Lord!

Mercy is one of God's attributes. *"The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy"* (Ps 103:8). *"For the LORD thy God is a merciful God"* (Deut 4:31). God is *"the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort"* (2 Cor 1:3). God's Word reveals to us that His mercy is *"great"* (Ps 145:8), *"tender"* (Ps 145:9), *"plenteous"* (Ps 103:8), *"multitude"* (Ps 106:45), *"rich"* (Eph 2:4), *"abundant"* (1 Pet 1:3), *"everlasting... from everlasting to everlasting"* (Ps 100:5; 103:17), and *"endureth for ever"* (Ps 136:1-26). How we must give thanks and praise to the Lord for His great mercy!

To be merciful means to be actively compassionate and sympathetic in mind, in thought and in action. It means to withhold punishment from offenders who deserve it and to give help to the helpless who do not deserve it. God showed mercy in saving us from the condemnation to Hell when we deserve it, and in helping us and blessing us when we do not deserve it. Truly, because of our sins, we only deserve to be condemned and destroyed, but *"It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not"* (Lam 3:22; cf. Neh 9:31). God's mercy is unconditional and up to His attributes and sovereign will, and not up to man's good works, efforts or merits. *"So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy"* (Rom 9:16; cf Titus 3:5). Understanding God's mercy and knowing that we are completely at God's mercy for ever, we must humble ourselves and cry for God's mercy, trust in God's mercy, and thank and praise God for His mercy for ever, without any complaint or murmuring in all situations.

THOUGHT: Because of God's mercy, I have not been consumed!

PRAYER: O Lord, I thank Thee for Thy great mercy upon me.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 12

PSALM 136

PSALM 136:1

*“O give thanks unto the LORD;
... for his mercy endureth for ever.”*

BE THANKFUL FOR GOD’S MERCY (2)

After creating the heaven and the earth, everything in it, and mankind, *“God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good”* (Gen 1:31). Truly, *“every creature of God is good”* (1 Tim 4:4). Then, we must see that everything bad and evil in this world is from sinful human beings due to the Fall of Adam and Eve as well as from Satan. We must not blame God for anything. The psalmist was full of gratitude and gave thanks to the Lord for His goodness and mercy shown in His creation and for His loving care: *“to him who alone doeth great wonders: for his mercy endureth for ever... by wisdom made the heavens:... stretched out the earth above the waters:... made great lights... The sun to rule by day... The moon and stars to rule by night... Who remembered us in our low estate: for his mercy endureth for ever... Who giveth food to all flesh: for his mercy endureth for ever... O give thanks unto the God of heaven: for his mercy endureth for ever”* (Ps 136:4-9, 23, 25-26).

How can mankind survive without light, air, the sun, the moon, rain, crops, water, good food, etc? Even the life and the breath we have are from God! Surely, *“the earth is full of the goodness of the LORD”* (Ps 33:5), and *“The earth, O LORD, is full of thy mercy”* (Ps 119:64), and *“For in him we live, and move, and have our being”* (Acts 17:28). When we get up in the morning and find that we are still alive and able to see, hear, move, and enjoy God’s goodness, we must be thankful to the Lord. Many are enjoying God’s goodness and mercy each day but keep living in sin and fail to give thanks to God and worship Him, and this provokes the holy God unto wrath (Rom 1:18, 21, 25). Sometimes, the good and righteous God has to send natural disasters to remind mankind of their ingratitude and their rebellion against His lordship and kingship to bring them to repentance. But sadly, many do not repent! What about you? *“While I live will I praise the LORD: I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being”* (Ps 146:2).

THOUGHT: As long as I live, I must be thankful for God’s mercy.

PRAYER: O Lord, I thank Thee and Thy mercy that I am still alive.

BE THANKFUL FOR GOD’S MERCY (3)

The psalmist continued to give thanks to the Lord for His deliverance, guidance, salvation and redemption of His people. *“To him that smote Egypt... brought out Israel from among them... divided the Red Sea into parts... made Israel to pass through the midst of it... overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red sea... To him which led his people through the wilderness... smote great kings... And gave their land for an heritage... hath redeemed us from our enemies”* (Ps 136:10-11, 13-17, 21, 24). This is because of God’s goodness and mercy to undeserving people, even to unfaithful and rebellious people! *“Thou, even thou, art LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens... And didst see the affliction of our fathers in Egypt... And thou didst divide the sea before them... Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments, and true laws, good statutes and commandments... But they and our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to thy commandments... but thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not... And they took strong cities, and a fat land, and possessed houses full of all goods... so they did eat, and were filled, and became fat, and delighted themselves in thy great goodness. Nevertheless they were disobedient, and rebelled against thee, and cast thy law behind their backs, and slew thy prophets which testified against them to turn them to thee... Yet many years didst thou forbear them, and testifiedst against them by thy spirit in thy prophets: yet would they not give ear... Nevertheless for thy great mercies’ sake thou didst not utterly consume them, nor forsake them; for thou art a gracious and merciful God”* (Neh 9:6, 9, 11, 13, 16-17, 25-26, 30-31).

God can, in His righteousness, consume sinful and rebellious people, including you and me, but because of His great mercy, He does not (Lam 3:22). We ought to be thankful for God’s great mercy always!

THOUGHT: I can turn to God in all things as His mercy is great.

PRAYER: O Lord, I thank Thee for Thy great mercy upon me.

BE THANKFUL FOR GOD’S MERCY (4)

Knowing God’s mercy is not enough, we are to trust in God’s great mercy and humbly cry for His mercy. And surely it is not in vain when we cry for God’s mercy in our repentance, in our troubles and in our need. This cry must come from a humble heart, acknowledging our helplessness, hopelessness and unworthiness, and then looking unto the Lord alone for forgiveness, help or deliverance. The Pharisee proudly thanks God with his self-righteousness and works and despises others. His prayer is rejected. On the other hand, the humble prayer of the tax collector for God’s mercy is heard (re: Luke 18:10-14).

It was not in vain when David trusted in God’s mercy (re: Ps 13:5). He cried unto the Lord in repentance, *“Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions”* (Ps 51:1), or for help and deliverance from troubles, *“Have mercy upon me, O LORD; for I am weak: O LORD, heal me; for my bones are vexed”* (Ps 6:2), and *“Have mercy upon me, O LORD; consider my trouble which I suffer of them that hate me, thou that liftest me up from the gates of death”* (Ps 9:13). It was not in vain when the two blind men cried unto the Lord Jesus, *“Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David”* (Matt 20:30). When the multitude rebuked them, they *“cried the more, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David”* (Matt 20:31).

What about you? Do you truly, humbly cry unto the Lord, *“Have mercy upon me, O Lord!”* when you encounter troubles, difficulties or dangers, when you make mistakes, when you need to finish your work or to meet the deadline, when you drive, when you pray, preach or teach, etc? We will not be disappointed when we humbly cry to God for help because His mercy is great and endures for ever. Knowing that we are still alive and enjoying God’s blessings because of God’s mercy alone, we must always be thankful to the Lord without any complaint or murmuring.

THOUGHT: It is not in vain for us to cry to God for His mercy.

PRAYER: O Lord, please have mercy upon me and help me.

BE THANKFUL FOR GOD'S MERCY (5)

It is not enough to trust in God's mercy and cry for God's mercy for a while only. We are to *"trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever"* (Ps 52:8), without giving up our faith, and this really demands our humble submission to the Lord and our full trust in Him.

When a woman of Canaan (Matt 15:22-28) came to Jesus and cried, *"Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil,"* her faith was tested. First, the Lord Jesus did not answer her a word, and His disciples asked Him to send her away. Next, on hearing Jesus say, *"I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel,"* the woman did not give up her trust, but came and *"worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me."* Finally, on hearing Jesus say, *"It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs,"* she humbly admitted her nothingness and unworthiness and said, *"Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."* She passed the test when she trusted in Jesus' mercy and did not give up until He showed His mercy to her. *"O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt."*

Sometimes, our merciful Lord just keeps quiet to test our faith and trust in Him when we cry to Him for help. Many give up and turn to other means or resources. What about you? Must we keep fixing our eyes on Him, crying and trusting in His mercy until He shows His mercy and sees us through our trials? *"Behold... our eyes wait upon the LORD our God, until that he have mercy upon us"* (Ps 123:2). *"Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me... until these calamities be overpast"* (Ps 57:1).

Keep on trusting in God's mercy and keep crying for His mercy in all things. This will keep us humble and thankful to the Lord without any complaint or murmuring.

THOUGHT: Just keep on trusting and crying for God's mercy.

PRAYER: O Lord, please have mercy upon me as long as I live.

BE THANKFUL FOR GOD’S MERCY (6)

It is because of God’s mercy alone that we enjoy His blessings and salvation. *“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost”* (Titus 3:5). Then, to enjoy more of God’s mercy, what must we do?

(1) Thank and praise God for His goodness and mercy: *“Praise ye the LORD. O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever”* (Ps 106:1; 107:1; 136:1).

(2) Confess and forsake sins: *“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy”* (Prov 28:13).

(3) Fear God: *“But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children’s children”* (Ps 103:17).

(4) Come to God in prayer: *“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need”* (Heb 4:16).

(5) Love God and keep God’s Word: *“And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments”* (Exod 20:6; John 14:23).

(6) Keep on trusting in God’s mercy: *“Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption”* (Ps 130:7; cf. Ps 147:11) and *“our eyes wait upon the LORD our God, until that he have mercy upon us”* (Ps 123:2b).

(7) Show mercy to others: *“Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy”* (Matt 5:7). *“Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful”* (Luke 6:36).

(8) Present our bodies a living and holy sacrifice: *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service”* (Rom 12:1). Do you?

THOUGHT: I must show God’s mercy to others as my Father does.

PRAYER: O Lord, may I show Thy mercy to others.

BE THANKFUL FOR GOD'S GRACE (1)

God's love, goodness, kindness, grace, mercy and longsuffering are so perfectly blended together that we cannot talk about God's love without His kindness and grace, or about His grace without His mercy and love. The LORD God proclaims, *"The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth"* (Exod 34:6).

By His mercy, God withholds punishment from offenders who deserve it and gives help to the helpless who do not deserve it. By His grace, God reaches out to help, strengthen, deliver, save, and bless undeserving people. It is entirely His love and kindness alone, and not their merits, efforts, labour or works. When God's people humbly cry unto Him for His mercy in their troubles, afflictions and repentance, their prayer is heard, and that is because of God's mercy. Even when we *"were dead in trespasses and sins,"* not even seeking after God or praying to Him, *"God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us"* saved us by His grace. *"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast"* (Eph 2:1, 4, 8-9). "Grace" in Greek is *"charis,"* which means "favor done without expectation of return; the absolutely free expression of the loving kindness of God to men finding its only motive in the bounty and benevolence of the Giver; unearned and unmerited favor" (Zodhiates). How amazing God's grace is!

Understanding God's grace for the unworthy and spiritually dead sinners, we must wisely humble ourselves all the time to receive more of God's grace with a thankful heart. *"But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble"* (James 4:6). Will you do that?

THOUGHT: By God's grace alone I am quickened spiritually.

PRAYER: O Lord, I thank Thee for Thy grace upon me, a sinner.

BE THANKFUL FOR GOD’S GRACE (2)

The Greek word for grace, *charis*, has 156 occurrences. The KJV translates it as “*grace*” 130 times, “*favour*” six times, “*thanks*” four times, “*thank*” four times, etc. “Grace indicates ‘favour’ on the part of the giver, and ‘thanks’ on the part of the receiver” (Vine’s). The more we enjoy God’s grace, the more we will give thanks to Him and glorify Him (re: 2 Cor 4:15). When we lack gratitude to God, we have failed to appreciate God’s grace.

God’s grace is God’s love, mercy, favour, help, and blessings toward mankind (common grace) and toward His children (saving grace) regardless of their merits. We are to be grateful to God for His common grace or general blessings toward us on this earth and in this universe such as life, rain, sunshine, seasons, fruitful crops, etc (Matt 5:45; Acts 14:17; 17:28). We are grateful to God even more for God’s sovereignty and love for He gave mankind His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, who came into the world as the perfect God-Man, to die for the sins of all and to rise again for the justification and salvation of everyone who believes and receives Him as his personal Lord and Saviour (John 3:16).

When sinners reject God’s common grace, especially God’s salvation in Christ, God is righteous and vindicated to condemn them to hell for their own foolish choice and arrogant decision. They can never blame God for anything! Even though God has shown His common grace toward mankind, the total depravity and rebellion of human hearts hinder them from sincerely believing in and wholeheartedly submitting to God and His Word. As a result, if we are cast into the lake of fire due to our unbelief and rebellion, we deserve it!

However, God has shown His saving grace to those He has called and chosen according to His own will and purpose! Praise the Lord!

THOUGHT: I must thank God for His grace upon this cursed world.

PRAYER: O Lord, I thank Thee for Thy grace upon all mankind.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 19

1 TIMOTHY 1:12-20

1 TIMOTHY 1:14

“... the grace of our Lord
was exceeding abundant...”

BE THANKFUL FOR GOD’S GRACE (3)

Once we are born again to be God’s children, we will understand and appreciate God’s grace and give thanks to Him more and more, especially for His special grace, saving grace or irresistible grace (re: Calvin’s TULIP). *“And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus”* (1 Tim 1:14).

It is amazing that while we were dead in sins, by His grace alone, He has *“quicken[ed] us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)”* (Eph 2:5). It is amazing that while we rebelled against Him and wanted to run away from Him, by His *“election of grace”* (Rom 11:5), He has drawn us to Himself (John 6:44, 65). It is amazing that while we were blinded and enslaved to Satan and his power of darkness, by God’s grace alone, He has opened our spiritual eyes and delivered us and brought us into His kingdom of light (Acts 26:18). It is amazing that when we did not have faith in Him and in His Word, by His grace alone, He has granted us faith to believe and to be saved (re: Eph 2:8). It is amazing that while we could not stand before the holy and righteous God due to our sins and trespasses, we are *“justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”* (Rom 3:24).

It is amazing that while we had no strength to follow the Lord, to keep His Word, and to overcome our sinful nature, temptations, and worldliness, by God’s grace alone, He has given us victory in Christ (2 Cor 2:14; cf. Rom 7:24-25; Gal 2:20). It is amazing that while we are living in this sinful world full of snares, temptations, hatred, opposition, etc, by God’s grace alone, our hearts are *“established with grace”* (Heb 13:9), and we are kept safe in His mighty hands to the end (John 10:28-29). God’s amazing grace is always sufficient for us (2 Cor 12:9) to carry us through all the trials of life, infirmities, troubles, temptations, etc, as long as we humbly rely on Him. Truly, the more we enjoy God’s grace, the more we shall give thanks to Him!

THOUGHT: I must thank God for His saving grace upon me.

PRAYER: O Lord, I thank Thee for Thy gracious work in saving me.

BE THANKFUL FOR GOD’S GRACE (4)

We are commanded to “*grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*” (2 Pet 3:18). This is because the more we know our Lord Jesus Christ, and what He has done for us and is willing to do for us, the more we rely on Him and enjoy His grace. Truly, “*The Word was made flesh... full of grace and truth... And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace*” (John 1:14, 16). It is not enough to be saved by our Lord’s grace through His death and resurrection. We must continue to live by His grace and serve Him by His grace each day, when we let Him live in us, move us, and help us to do His will and Word. “*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. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain*” (Gal 2:20-21). How then do we obtain more grace from the Lord?

(1) Appreciate God’s grace with a humble and thankful heart: Ungodly and arrogant people despise God’s grace for them (Jude 4). What about us? May God help us appreciate His grace with a humble and thankful heart. It is a great blessing that “*Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD*” (Gen 6:8); that God said to Moses, “*thou hast also found grace in my sight*” (Exod 33:12, 17); that the angel said to Mary, “*Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour (grace) with God*” (Luke 1:30); and that the Lord said to Paul, “*My grace is sufficient for thee*” (2 Cor 12:9). Have we found grace/favour with God? “*He giveth more grace... God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble*” (James 4:6). It is always good and wise to acknowledge our nothingness and unworthiness as well as our great need for God and His grace, love and mercy. This is so that we may humbly turn to Him, trust in Him, rely on Him and submit to Him with our thanksgiving and praise, “*To the praise of the glory of his grace*” (Eph 1:6). Do you?

THOUGHT: I must grow in God’s grace and knowledge each day.

PRAYER: O Lord, may I humbly trust and depend on Thee more.

BE THANKFUL FOR GOD’S GRACE (5)

(2) Come to the Lord in prayer: God is “*the God of all grace*” (1 Pet 5:10), our Lord Jesus Christ is “*full of grace and truth*” (John 1:14), and the Holy Spirit is “*the Spirit of grace*” (Heb 10:29), so grace comes from the Lord our God alone (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3). Truly, “*For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly*” (Ps 84:11). Humbly coming to the Lord Himself in prayer is a means to obtain God’s grace, so let us come to the Lord more often and all the time, “*Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need*” (Heb 4:16). Our lack of faith, strength, love, grace, victory, thanksgiving, spiritual fruit, etc is due to our lack of constant reliance on the Lord in prayer, just as the branches depend on the Vine (John 15:5). Is this the case with you?

(3) Read and keep God’s Word with a reverent heart: God’s Word is “*the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified*” (Acts 20:32; cf. 14:3) and His gospel is “*the gospel of the grace of God*” (Acts 20:24). Reading and keeping God’s Word is a means to obtain God’s grace. “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord*” (Col 3:16). Do you read and keep God’s Word each day?

(4) Trust and grow in the Lord’s grace and be strong in His grace: God’s grace is great (Acts 4:33), exceeding (2 Cor 9:14), and sufficient (2 Cor 12:9), and God willingly “*giveth more grace*” (James 4:6). Therefore, we must not be proud and self-complacent. We must keep growing in His grace (2 Pet 3:18), “*continue in the grace of God*” (Acts 13:43) and “*be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus*” (2 Tim 2:1), that we may live a fruitful and victorious life for His glory.

THOUGHT: I must come to the Lord always for His grace and help.

PRAYER: O Lord, I thank Thee for Thy sufficient grace for me.

BE THANKFUL FOR GOD’S GRACE (6)

(5) Show God’s grace to others: Jesus is *“full of grace and truth”* (John 1:14). Even from young, Jesus *“grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him... increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour (grace) with God and man”* (Luke 2:40, 52). Out of the abundance of His grace, our Lord Jesus’ heart, word, life and ministry is full of grace (re: Luke 4:22). If we let our gracious Lord Jesus live in us, we are *“also so to walk, even as he walked”* (1 John 2:6), who first *“came not to judge the world, but to save the world”* (John 12:47), and we are here as His witnesses!

It is always good to remember that we used to be *“dead in trespasses and sins”* like others and only deserve to be despised and condemned without God’s saving grace! The more our heart is full of God’s grace, the more our mouth and life and ministry will *“minister grace”* to others (Eph 4:29). Those who are lacking in God’s grace will never be able to show any true love and grace to others, so we should not be surprised, hurt or offended by the contempt, unfriendly look, unkind words, angry voice, criticism, quick judgment, hatred, opposition or persecution from others. But let us be like our Saviour Jesus, who graciously said to His betrayer, *“Friend, wherefore art thou come?”* (Matt 26:50) and who graciously looked upon His failed disciple who had denied Him thrice (Luke 22:61). Can others see our gracious Lord in us? Do we reflect our Lord *“Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously”* (1 Pet 2:22-23; cf. Isa 53:7)? We ought to be thankful for His sufficient grace that we are able to endure all things, to live a fruitful life, to attend a worship service or a prayer meeting or to serve Him, etc. We must not proudly despise those who are not able to do so, but must graciously pray for them.

THOUGHT: *“By the grace of God I am what I am ...”* (1 Cor 15:10).

PRAYER: Lord, help me minister grace to others humbly and thankfully.

BE THANKFUL FOR GOD’S LOVE (1)

Human love is selfish, conditional, changeable and limited. That is why we would rather trust in God’s love (agape) and the love of His true children who are born again to be partakers of His love (agape). “... Love (agape) is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God... for God is love (agape)” (1 John 4:7-8). Many have been disappointed at human love expressed through human lips, e.g: “I love you so much, I love you most in the world!” But deep in the person’s heart, he is saying, “I love you because you are so nice, kind, smart, good-looking, lovely, charming, attractive, wealthy, superior, etc” or “I love you because you love me... because you are on my side, etc.” However, this human love will change or disappear when these conditions change. Are we still willing to love someone who is ugly, inferior, unkind, ungodly, sinful, deceitful, wicked, and rebellious against you? Are we still willing to die for them?

When we are good and kind to others, willing to help and to give, we would still want to keep the best and not lose what is most precious to us. Suppose you were a king and had all precious things: glory, fame, wealth, power, and especially your only son whom you loved. This son was so lovely, good, gentle, obedient, submissive, gifted, and smart, and he so loved you that his soul was knitted to your soul to be with you all the time with a sweet and lovely fellowship. You also so love your son that you always want to keep him with you wherever you were. Then, would you be willing to send your only son to another country which is polluted, unhygienic, and full of pestilences and wicked people? Would you be willing to let your son die for those who deserve to be condemned and executed because they have despised you, blasphemed you, violated your laws, rebelled against you and killed your servants? No one would or could do that except God. “*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son*” (John 3:16). We would rather trust and thank God for His love!

THOUGHT: I should trust in God’s love and be thankful to Him.

PRAYER: O Lord, I thank Thee for Thy great love, grace and mercy.

BE THANKFUL FOR GOD'S LOVE (2)

Many do not see, know, understand or believe in God's love, so they blame God for all the chaos, sorrow, and evil in this world! We cannot fully comprehend and understand *"the breadth, and length, and depth, and height"* of God's love, *"which passeth knowledge,"* without His revelation (Eph 3:18-19)! Once we can understand God's love, we shall be thankful for His goodness, His mercy, His grace and His best, even His love for us when we only deserve to be condemned!

How amazing and marvelous God's love is when God the Father, the holy and loving Creator, was willing to give His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to die for His sinful, ungrateful, and rebellious human creatures, who deserve to be condemned because they have broken His laws and committed all kinds of sins, blasphemed and rebelled against Him, and killed His prophets and servants! Truly, *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"* (John 3:16). *"In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him"* (1 John 4:9).

How amazing and marvelous God's love is when God the Son, the holy and loving Creator, was willing to come into this sinful and cursed world humbly as a man, even a servant, and died for the sins of the whole world including yours and mine, and on the third day rose again to be the living and almighty Saviour to those who believe in Him! Truly, *"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends"* (John 15:13). *"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"* (Rom 5:8). *"Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us"* (1 John 3:16). Do you truly believe in God's amazing and marvelous love for you?

THOUGHT: God the Father gave His Son, who gave His life for me.

PRAYER: O Lord, how I thank Thee for giving up Thy life for me!

BE THANKFUL FOR GOD'S LOVE (3)

As human love is selfish, conditional, changeable, and limited, we would rather trust in God's love (agape) with a thankful heart because "*God is love (agape)*" (1 John 4:8,16), and His agape love is:

- Eternal and unchangeable: "*I have loved thee with an everlasting love*" (Jer 31:3).
- Unlimited: "*for his great love wherewith he loved us*" (Eph 2:4).
- Unconditional and unmerited: "*Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us*" (1 John 4:10).
- Sacrificial: "*he gave his only begotten Son... he laid down his life for us*" (John 3:16; 1 John 3:16).
- Perfect without fear: "*perfect love casteth out fear*" (1 John 4:18).
- Longsuffering: "*suffereth long*" (1 Cor 13:4)
- Beneficial: "*is kind*" (1 Cor 13:4)
- Well-behaved: "*Doth not behave itself unseemly*" (1 Cor 13:5)
- Humble: "*vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up*" (1 Cor 13:4).
- Unselfish: "*envieth not... seeketh not her own*" (1 Cor 13:4-5).
- Good-tempered: "*is not easily provoked*" (1 Cor 13:5)
- Holy: "*thinketh no evil... rejoiceth not in iniquity*" (1 Cor 13:5-6); "*Love worketh no ill to his neighbour*" (Rom 13:10).
- Truth-based: "*rejoiceth in the truth*" (1 Cor 13:6), "*Let love be without dissimulation*" (Rom 12:9), "*by love unfeigned*" (2 Cor 6:6)
- Forbearing: "*beareth all things*" (1 Cor 13:7)
- Hopeful: "*hopeth all things*" (1 Cor 13:7)
- Faithful: "*believeth all things*" (1 Cor 13:7), "*... he loved them unto the end*" (John 13:1)
- Enduring: "*endureth all things*" (1 Cor 13:7)
- Unfailing (long-lasting, effective): "*never faileth*" (1 Cor 13:8)
- Most valuable: "*the greatest of these is charity*" (1 Cor 13:13).

It is a great blessing when "*the love of Christ constraineth us*" (2 Cor 5:14) so that we may love God and others with His agape love.

THOUGHT: I must thank God for His unmerited and eternal love.

PRAYER: O Lord, how I thank Thee for Thy marvelous love for me!

TUESDAY, JANUARY 26

ROMANS 9:9-16

GALATIANS 2:20

“... the Son of God,
who loved me...”

BE THANKFUL FOR GOD’S LOVE (4)

We can never be wholeheartedly thankful for God’s love if we do not truly know it, understand it, believe it and receive it for ourselves personally.

God did and still loves His covenant people, Israel, with His sovereign and unmerited love without any exception. *“The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers...”* (Deut 7:7-8; cf Rom 9:23; Mal 1:2-3).

God did and still loves all mankind with His sovereign and unmerited love without any exception. *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life”* (John 3:16), and the Lord Jesus did love and die for all mankind (1 John 3:16).

The Lord Jesus Christ has loved His Church with His sovereign and unmerited love without any exception. *“... Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish”* (Eph 5:25-27).

Many know the love of God and the Lord Jesus with only their head-knowledge, and so their hearts are still lonely and empty. When *“we have known (ginosko) and believed the love that God hath to us”* with our heart-knowledge (1 John 4:16), and have received God’s love for us personally, *“the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me”* (Gal 2:20), our hearts will be warmed and full of comfort. We will give thanks and praise to our God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

THOUGHT: My Lord Jesus loved me, died and rose again for me.

PRAYER: O Lord, I thank Thee for Thy love and death for me.

BE THANKFUL FOR GOD’S LOVE (5)

Truly knowing and appreciating God’s love, we will not take His love for granted. Many so called Christian speakers today preach messages on love to please their audience who like to hear such messages without “offensive” terms like “sin,” “worldliness,” “repentance,” “condemnation” or “hell.” They like to hear and sing about love while they live in sin and worldliness, and worship and walk in their own will and way! They even fervently promote “love, unity and harmony” among themselves and among followers of other faiths, leading to the Ecumenical Movement and eventually to the One-world Religion. They do not understand God’s agape love at all, which is holy and truth-based. Charity does not rejoice *“in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth”* (1 Cor 13:6), and *“thy word is truth”* (John 17:17). What about you?

“Iniquity” (Greek: *adikia*) means injustice, unrighteousness. *“All unrighteousness (adikia) is sin”* (1 John 5:17), “impropriety, iniquity, unrighteousness, wickedness... This wickedness is seen more particularly in the neglect of the true God and His laws and in an adherence to the world or to idolatry; hence, *adikia* means impiety, ungodliness, contempt of God” (Zodhiates). The holy God does not rejoice in sin, injustice, iniquity, unrighteousness, or ungodliness at all. Those who take God’s love for granted and take God’s holiness and righteousness lightly may think that they are the Lord’s servants and children, but they will be shocked, frightened and shamed when the Lord says to them, *“I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity (adikia)”* (Luke 13:27)!

God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son with a purpose — to save repentant sinners from sin, that denying *“ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world”* (Titus 2:12). Are you really thankful for God’s love with reverence — rejoicing in God’s truth, and not in iniquity?

THOUGHT: The holy God is not pleased with sin and iniquity!

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for Thy holy love in saving me from sin.

BE THANKFUL FOR GOD’S LOVE (6)

Just as God has loved us so much, He expects us to love Him (Matt 10:37; John 21:15) and one another with His holy love through keeping His Word. *“If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love... This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you”* (John 15:10, 12), and the blessing is God’s presence with us (John 14:23). Many think or feel that they “love” God and “love” one another while they do not live, worship, serve and love according to God’s Word. They are just deceiving themselves! *“But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected... He that saith he abideth in him (Jesus) ought himself also so to walk, even as he (Jesus) walked”* (1 John 2:5-6). Jesus loves sinners but hates sin. *“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten”* (Rev 3:19). Constrained by Christ’s love, we can love as He has loved us *“though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved”* (2 Cor 12:15), and *“lay down our lives for the brethren”* (1 John 3:16), even *“love your enemies, bless... do good... pray for them...”* (Matt 5:44). But we must not compromise on God’s will, Word and truth.

The Lord Jesus rebuked the church in Ephesus for having left their first love (Rev 2:4), and warns us, *“because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold”* (Matt 24:12). God’s Word commands, *“Keep yourselves in the love of God”* (Jude 21). How?

- (a) Humbly pray to God: *“And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ”* (2 Thess 3:5).
- (b) Always rely on the Lord: *“... 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), and *“the love of Christ constraineth us”* (2 Cor 5:14).
- (c) Sincerely repent of our failures: *“Repent, and do the first works”* (Rev 2:5; Ps 51:3-4).

THOUGHT: I must be *“rooted and grounded in love”* (Eph 3:17).

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

BETTER TO LOVE GOD WHOLEHEARTEDLY (1)

The Lord Jesus summarises God’s Ten Commandments: *“And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these”* (Mark 12:30-31). Are we keeping God’s commandments? What does it mean to love the Lord our God with all our heart, our soul, our mind and our strength?

(a) Loving God means keeping God’s Word: Jesus says, *“If a man love me, he will keep my words”* (John 14:23). We must not separate loving God from obeying God. If we love God, we must obey Him. If we fail to obey God, we fail to love Him. To love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength means that out of love we will keep His Word and obey Him with our whole being. Our beliefs, faiths, doctrine, mindsets, thinking, desires, motives, purposes, plans, conduct, behaviours, speech, deeds, worship, service, personal life, studies, work, family, church, ministry, relationship with others, etc. must be in accordance with God’s Word. God demands our full obedience, and we must obey Him wholeheartedly. King Saul only partly obeyed God, but he deceived himself into thinking that he had totally obeyed God. He declared, *“I have performed the commandment of the LORD”* (1 Sam 15:13) while he spared Agag and the best of the sheep and the oxen, and justified his disobedience by saying that those animals were spared *“to sacrifice unto the LORD”* (1 Sam 15:15)! Was God pleased with Saul and his sacrifice? Absolutely not! *“Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,... Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king”* (1 Sam 15:22-23). Do we wholeheartedly love God and keep His Word? *“But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected”* (1 John 2:5).

THOUGHT: If I love God, I must obey Him and keep His Word.

PRAYER: O Lord, help me love Thee indeed by keeping Thy Word.

BETTER TO LOVE GOD WHOLEHEARTEDLY (2)

(b) Loving God means loving Him above all: Jesus still challenges us, *“He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me”* (Matt 10:37), and *“lovest thou me more than these?”* (John 21:15). If we love someone or something above God, that person or thing has become our idol. The jealous God hates idolatry, and He cannot bear His people and children failing to love Him above all. Sometimes, God tests our love for Him as He did Abraham, demanding him to offer up his beloved son Isaac for a sacrifice. Thank God for His sufficient grace that Abraham passed the test (Gen 22:12). To love God above all, we must worship Him alone without any idols or images even in our heart. To love God, we must love His Name with respect and honour. To love God, we must love and keep His Day of worship holy (Exod 20:11).

Loving God with all our heart means loving Him with all our zeal, desire, and passion. When we follow the Lord, worship Him and serve Him as a routine without any fervent love or zeal like the church in Ephesus (Rev 2:4), we have failed to love Him with all our heart! Loving God with all our soul means loving Him with all our life faithfully unto death as our soul is our life (Matt 16:26; Luke 17:33). To save one’s life or soul, many compromise or give up their faith to avoid trouble, contempt, opposition or persecution. They have failed to love God with all their soul! Loving God with all our mind means loving Him with all our thought, understanding, intention, purpose and plan. If we do not think about God, His glory, His Word, and His will in our plans, arrangements, choices, decisions, or aims, we have failed to love Him with all our mind. Loving God with all our strength means loving Him with all our efforts in words and deeds. If we are lazy and fail to give our best to seek God for grace and strength to do His Word and will, we have failed to love God with all our strength! What about you?

THOUGHT: Do I truly love God above all people and things?

PRAYER: O Lord, help me to truly love Thee above all.

BETTER TO LOVE GOD WHOLEHEARTEDLY (3)

(c) Loving God means honouring and pleasing Him above all: Jesus said to the Jews, *“But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you. I am come in my Father’s name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive. How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?”* (John 5:42-44). Many so-called “Christians” nowadays ignore God’s Word and turn to their church leaders and popular speakers with great “credentials” for their teachings, instead of diligently studying God’s Word and carefully using God’s Word to examine their teachings like the Bereans (Acts 17:11)! They do not have *“the love of God... and seek not the honour that cometh from God only”*! Many others compromise to please men, either the leaders or members in their church or from other churches, or their loved ones and friends, and they even justify their compromise by using terms like “love, unity and harmony”! They have failed to please God alone. *“If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ”* (Gal 1:10). What about you?

(d) Loving God means hating sins, evil, ungodliness and worldliness: Many think that they love God, but they also love the world and sins. They are compromising and tolerant towards sins, worldliness and wrong doctrines! They bring worldly entertainment into the church, worship God in their own ways, and do whatever is pleasing to men to attract them to their church! Then, the love of God is not truly in them! God is holy and righteous, and His love is holy and righteous, so He hates sins and evil. *“Ye that love the LORD, hate evil”* (Ps 97:10). *“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him”* (1 John 2:15), and *“be not conformed to this world”* (Rom 12:2), and *“be... separate”* (2 Cor 6:17). *“Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD”* (2 Chron 19:2). What about you?

THOUGHT: To love God, I must please Him and hate sin and evil.

PRAYER: Lord, please help me please Thee above all and hate sin.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 1

LUKE 10:25-37

MATTHEW 22:39

*"Thou shalt love thy
neighbour as thyself."*

BETTER TO LOVE OUR NEIGHBOURS AS OURSELVES (1)

If we love our neighbours as ourselves, we will respect them, cherish them, protect them, tell them the truth and be happy with their success and prosperity without any envy, jealousy or covetousness. If all the people in this world truly love God wholeheartedly and love one another as themselves, there would be peace, joy and happiness! Sadly, due to Adam and Eve's disobedience, sin and death entered into the world (Rom 5:12), and all human beings have inherited the sinful nature whether they believe or like it or not (re: Ps 51:5, Jer 17:9).

Human beings have tried to maintain peace and happiness in their families, communities, societies and countries through human efforts, education, disciplines, religions, and philosophies, but they could not, cannot and will never be able to do that without the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. *"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). Human beings must be saved by the Lord Jesus Christ and be born again by the Holy Spirit and God's Word to *"be partakers of the divine nature"* (2 Pet 1:4) so that they may be able to keep God's commandments, *"... every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God... for God is love"* (1 John 4:7-8).

Who are our neighbours? Our neighbours are our family members, relatives, neighbours in our neighbourhood, friends and anyone we may meet up with. In Luke 10:29-37, while the priest and the Levite avoided the injured man, the good Samaritan was kind to him although he had never met him before. Why? It is because this good Samaritan regarded this injured man as his neighbour and showed compassion for him. Thus, if we do not have compassion for the people around us, we have failed to regard them as our neighbours and we have failed to love them as ourselves!

THOUGHT: Do I recognise and love my neighbours as myself?

PRAYER: O Lord, please help me love my neighbours as myself.

BETTER TO LOVE OUR NEIGHBOURS AS OURSELVES (2)

Honour thy father and thy mother (Exod 20:12): Our nearest neighbours are our parents whom we must love and honour. *"Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth"* (Eph 6:1-3). Only when our parents teach or tell us to do what is against God and His Word, we then must politely explain to them why according to God's Word we cannot obey them.

Thou shalt not kill (Exod 20:13): Many think that they are good because they have never killed anyone, not even an animal or a chicken. But, to God, *"Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him"* (1 John 3:15). Jesus Christ confirms *"that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca (worthless, useless), shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool (silly, stupid), shall be in danger of hell fire"* (Matt 5:22). When we hate someone, we would not want to meet or communicate with him. We would not be happy with his existence around us. Thus, hating others is equivalent to committing murder in our hearts. Similarly with suicide, abortion, and euthanasia. Partaking of the things harmful to the body (eg. cigarettes, drugs, alcohol, harmful chemicals in the food stuff, etc) is like killing oneself slowly.

Thou shalt not commit adultery (Exod 20:14): The Lord Jesus says, *"That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart"* (Matt 5:28). This applies to sexual lusts, pornography, fornication, adultery, homosexuality, sexual abuse, etc. The husband is supposed to love his wife faithfully, and the wife to obey and respect her husband (Eph 5:22-25). Do you?

THOUGHT: *"Love worketh no ill to his neighbour"* (Rom 13:10).

PRAYER: O Lord, please make me a blessing to my neighbours.

BETTER TO LOVE OUR NEIGHBOURS AS OURSELVES (3)

“Thou shalt not steal” (Exod 20:15): Cheating, plagiarism, tax evasion, copyright infringement, deceit or defraud, exploitation, irresponsibility, theft, kidnapping, robbery, borrowing without returning are equivalent to stealing. Failure to do our duty for God is also like stealing. *“Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation”* (Mal 3:8-9).

“Thou shalt not bear false witness” (Exod 20:16): Telling lies is sin. *“But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil”* (Matt 5:37).

“Thou shalt not covet” (Exod 20:17): Coveting our neighbour’s house, wife, car, high-tech devices, and *“any thing that is thy neighbour’s”* is sin! *“Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry”* (Col 3:5).

“For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all” (James 2:10): Telling lies or dishonouring parents is one sin, but in God’s sight it is equivalent to breaking all the commandments (including murder, adultery, idolatry, etc). *“Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin”* (Rom 3:20). No one is able to stand righteous before the holy and righteous God. We need to be justified by our Saviour Jesus’ blood (Rom 5:9, 17; 8:34; 1 Cor 1:30). *“That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit”* (Rom 8:4). We need the Holy Spirit to produce the fruit of agape love in us so that we may love God and others. All is by God’s grace alone, so all thanks, praise and glory be unto God alone.

THOUGHT: I must depend on the Lord to keep all the moral law.

PRAYER: O Lord, convict me when I break one point of Thy law.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 4

MATTHEW 15:32-39

1 CORINTHIANS 13:3

*“... though I bestow all my goods
to feed the poor... and have not charity,
it profiteth me nothing.”*

BETTER TO LOVE OUR NEIGHBOURS AS OURSELVES (4)

The health-and-wealth gospel and the social gospel have turned many churches away from the Christ-given top priority: the salvation of sinners, for whom Jesus came and died and rose again. Charity work (eg. giving help, support and comfort to the poor, the afflicted and the needy) is good work, but it must come after evangelism work. The Lord Jesus did not provide food or material blessings to attract people to come first to enjoy and then to listen to His teaching or preaching, like what many churches are doing today. They invite people to a meal or a party and after that share with them a comforting message on love, peace, joy, so that these people may be willing to come again or to join their church. There is no serious *“repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Acts 20:21). However, John the Baptist first preached, *“Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”* (Matt 3:2). The Lord Jesus first preached, *“Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”* (Matt 4:17). Jesus’ apostles did the same (Mark 6:12; Acts 2:38; 17:30; etc.). The Bible records only two occasions when the Lord Jesus multiplied bread and fish to feed the crowd after they had listened to His teaching. And He did this only because He did not want them to faint on their way back home (Matt 14:15-16; 15:32).

As God is holy and righteous, *“he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.”* If we truly love others as ourselves, we should pray for them and share the pure Gospel of salvation with them, so that they may repent and be saved and escape the wrath of God. Failure to do this first means we do not truly love them with agape love. And should they die today after enjoying our material blessings, they shall perish for ever! All our good works are for nothing. *“And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity (agape), it profiteth me nothing”* (1 Cor 13:3).

THOUGHT: I must love and share with others God’s salvation.

PRAYER: Lord, constrain me to share Thy salvation with others.

BETTER TO LOVE AS CHRIST HAS LOVED US (1)

It is better to love the Lord wholeheartedly and to love others as ourselves because it is God’s commandment for us. Failure to keep God’s commandment is sin. The verb “love” (John 13:34) here in Greek is *agapao*, referring to the love of God and from God, as God is love (*agape*). “*Beloved, let us love (agapao) one another: for love (agape) is of God; and every one that loveth (agapao) is born of God, and knoweth God... for God is love (agape)*” (1 John 4:7-8). It should be noted that the verb “love” (*agapao*) with God’s love is different from the verb “love” (*phileo*) with friendly love, which indicates “feelings, warm affection, the kind of love expressed by a kiss” (Zodhiates).

Nowadays, many promote “love, harmony and unity,” and think that they are obeying God’s Word. Actually, the love they promote is not the divine love from God; and consequently, their harmony and unity is worldly, and it surely will neither please God nor last long. To remind His disciples to love one another with His divine love, the Lord Jesus gave them a new commandment in John 13:34-35. Thus, it is better for us to keep God’s commandment to love one another with His divine love, just as the Lord Jesus Christ has loved us. What does it mean to love as Christ has loved us?

True and Divine Love: Human love is conditional, selfish and changeable, so it is not reliable or trustworthy. But the Lord Jesus has truly loved us with His divine love, so we can trust and turn to Him in all situations. “*Let love (agape) be without dissimulation (without hypocrisy or pretence)*” (Rom 12:9). We can never glorify our Lord when others see our insincere love, loving just with our words without a loving heart. Will they trust in our love for them? Do we love them with true and divine love the way Christ has loved us?

THOUGHT: I must love others as Christ has loved me.

PRAYER: Lord, constrain me to love others as Thou hast loved me.

BETTER TO LOVE AS CHRIST HAS LOVED US (2)

Holy love: Human love may be full of human zeal and passion but it may be without holiness. God is holy, and His love is holy. God’s holy love *“rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth”* (1 Cor 13:6) and does not allow Him to compromise or tolerate anything unholy, ungodly, unrighteous, worldly and anything contrary to His holy will and holy Word. God loves sinful mankind, but He hates sin. To save sinners, God sent His only begotten Son to die for their sins. The death of Jesus on the cross shows God’s holy and righteous love. The holy and loving God does not forgive sins without any price, but with the price that we can never imagine —His only begotten Son!

Out of His holy love, Jesus came into this world and was willing to die and shed His blood as a price to redeem repentant sinners from sins, curse and condemnation. However, Jesus hates sins and rebuked the religious leaders who *“outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity”* (Matt 23:28), and chased the merchants out of the temple (Matt 21:13). Jesus rebuked them so that they might acknowledge their sins and repent, but Jesus never compromised to worship with them or serve God the Father with them.

Sadly, nowadays many so-called “Christians” and their leaders compromise and welcome all kinds of faiths and beliefs, and they think that they are more loving and friendly than other conservative Christians! They have failed to love others with Christ’s holy love! If a person is walking in the way to destruction, and we fail to warn him, we have not loved him with God’s love. At the same time, God’s holy love requires us not to go in the way of those who are disobedient to God. *“And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother”* (2 Thess 3:14-15).

THOUGHT: I must love others with God’s holy love.

PRAYER: Lord, guide me to love others as Thou hast loved me.

BETTER TO LOVE AS CHRIST HAS LOVED US (3)

Unfailing love: God's love is divine, everlasting, and never fails (re: 1 Cor 13:8). The Greek word for "*fail*" is *ekipto*, which means "fall, fall out of; metaphorically, fall away, fail, be without effect, be in vain" (Zodhiates). God's love will not be in vain or without effect or fail us. We must wholeheartedly trust and appreciate His love. God's love will never disappoint us, so we must hope in His love, whereas human love is limited and may fail us any time. We must neither expect nor trust too much in human love, so that we will not be disappointed. The Lord Jesus commands us to love others as He has loved us. Are others disappointed with our love for them in Christ?

Enduring love: God's love "*suffereth long, and is kind... Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things*" (1 Cor 13:4, 7). Our Lord suffered and endured hatred, envy, contempt, opposition, criticism, misjudgment, and persecutions unto death. Jesus also endured His immature disciples' weaknesses and failures. Why? It is because of His unfailing and enduring love! With God's enduring love, Paul could say, "*in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings*" (2 Cor 6:4-5).

Many couples cannot endure each other nor suffer long. Due to their limited human love, they cannot bear with each other's weaknesses, preferences, or differences. They complain, murmur, quarrel, disrespect each other, etc. Their home is not a happy home anymore! Only with Christ's enduring love, can we bear with our loved ones and Christian brethren despite their weaknesses. We can pray for them, and help them grow in God's grace and knowledge. We must be "*strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness*" (Col 1:11). Endure with joyfulness!

THOUGHT: By God's strength, I must endure with joy.

PRAYER: O Lord, please strengthen me to endure with joy.

BETTER TO LOVE AS CHRIST HAS LOVED US (4)

Sacrificial love: God’s love is full of life and sacrifice. No love is greater than God’s sacrificial love when *“he gave his only begotten Son”* (John 3:16) for the salvation of mankind. No love is greater than Christ’s sacrificial love when *“he laid down his life for us”* (1 John 3:16). The Lord Jesus sacrificed His glory, comfort, and blessings in Heaven to come into this cursed and wicked world to save sinners! The Lord Jesus sacrificed His time, His reputation, and even His life to die in place of sinners including you and me! Only God’s sacrificial love can move us to willingly sacrifice our time, our substance, and even our life for the Lord and others. *“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren”* (1 John 3:16). Being constrained by Christ’s love, Paul, who used to be a persecutor, was able to say, *“I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved”* (2 Cor 12:15). How we truly need God’s sacrificial love to constrain us to love Him and others!

Unselfish love: Human love is very selfish and conditional, but God’s love is unselfish and *“envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil”* (1 Cor 13:4-5). With God’s unselfish love, the Lord Jesus came to be a blessing to the people around Him. Jesus did not grab material things for Himself, neither did Paul. *“I will not be burdensome to you: for I seek not yours (your material things), but you... we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong: and this also we wish, even your perfection”* (2 Cor 12:14; 13:9). Only with God’s unselfish love can we love others for their benefit and edification without selfish motives, without seeking our own or taking advantage of others, without envying others when they are more successful, prosperous, or popular, etc. What about you?

THOUGHT: Do I willingly lay down my life for my brethren?

PRAYER: Lord, please constrain me to love as Thou lovest.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 9

JOHN 8:1-11

JOHN 8:11

*"Neither do I condemn thee:
go, and sin no more."*

BETTER TO LOVE AS CHRIST HAS LOVED US (5)

Gracious love: God's love is not only sacrificial and unselfish but also gracious, even toward unworthy and undeserving sinners. Jesus was so gracious toward the sinful woman who repented and washed His feet with her tears and anointed them with the ointment. He said to her, *"Thy sins are forgiven... Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace"* (Luke 7:48, 50). And to the woman who was caught committing adultery, Jesus said, *"Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more"* (John 8:11). Despite Judas Iscariot's betrayal, Jesus said to him, *"Friend, wherefore art thou come?... Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?"* (Matt 26:50; Luke 22:48). And to Peter, despite his denial, Jesus said, *"But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not"* (Luke 22:32); and with a gracious look, *"... the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter"* (Luke 22:61). To the repentant thief on the cross despite his sinful life in the past, Jesus said, *"Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise"* (Luke 23:43). To Saul (later named Paul), despite his blasphemy and persecution, Jesus said, *"But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee"* (Acts 26:16). Only with God's gracious love can we still love the undeserving, the weak, the immature, or the inferior with our heart, words, reaction, and deeds as the Lord Jesus has loved us! Otherwise, we are nothing.

Practical love: God does not love in word only, but in deed and in truth when He gave His only begotten Son and when the Lord Jesus laid down His life for us sinners. He wants us to do the same. *"But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth"* (1 John 3:17-18). Do we?

THOUGHT: Do others see God's gracious love in me?

PRAYER: Lord, may Thy gracious love be made manifest in me.

BETTER TO MAINTAIN OUR FIRST LOVE FOR CHRIST (1)

The first love of a bride and a bridegroom is beautiful and full of zeal, enthusiasm, passion, fervency and intensity. This first love is expressed by their strong desire to be together, to love, please, care for and serve each other. The Bible likens the relationship between the Lord Jesus Christ and the Church to that of the Bridegroom and the Bride (Matt 25:1-13); and that of the Husband and the Wife (2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:23-25; Rev 19:7). Truly, the Lord Jesus Christ *“loved the church, and gave himself for it”* (Eph 5:25). His love for her is always so great, intense, fervent, and ardent that He cannot stand it when her love for Him cools off, grows cold or dies down. That is why our Lord Jesus warns and rebukes the church in Ephesus as well as the churches in all ages, even our church and each one of us today. The verbs which are in the present tense, indicate that the Holy Spirit is still speaking to each of us and to all churches. *“He that hath an ear; let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches”* (Rev 2:7).

To the church of Ephesus in Asia Minor (modern Turkey), our Lord Jesus manifests Himself as *“he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks”* (Rev 2:1). The verbs are in the present tense and in the active voice, denoting that our Lord and Saviour is living and active. The term *“holdeth”* means “hold fast, have in one’s power, not to let go” (Zodhiates). The seven stars are the seven messengers/pastors of the churches, and the seven candlesticks are the seven churches (Rev 1:20). Here, they are the local, visible and imperfect churches. Our Lord Jesus is holding fast His servants and is walking and working in His churches. This means our Lord Jesus is the Head and is sovereign over His churches. He has authority to establish or remove the churches. *“I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent”* (Rev 2:5). What about us and our church?

THOUGHT: My Saviour Jesus Christ is sovereign and in control.

PRAYER: Lord, help me always to acknowledge Thy sovereignty.

BETTER TO MAINTAIN OUR FIRST LOVE FOR CHRIST (2)

To the believers in Ephesus, the Lord Jesus has words of praise as well as of warning and rebuke in His absolute omniscience. *"I know (perfectly) thy works."* What you and I have done and are doing cannot be hidden from our Lord, even our motives and love for Him, as He knows all things and everything in minute details clearly and perfectly.

Words of praise: *"I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars. And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted... But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate"* (Rev 2:2, 3, 6). The believers are praised for their labour for the Lord and for His Name without being faint or weary, for their patience or endurance (*hupomene*) without giving up their faith, for their godly attitude and discernment against false apostles and for their separatist stand and godly hatred against the deeds of the Nicolaitans. According to early church fathers, the Nicolaitans are those who, while professing themselves to be Christians, live in ungodliness, immorality and worldliness, disregarding God's Word. It is good for us to labour for the Lord, to endure all things, and to keep ourselves pure and separate from false teachers and from professing, disobedient and ungodly "believers." However, such good qualities are not enough if we leave or lose our first love for the Lord.

Words of rebuke: The Lord Jesus says, *"Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love"* (Rev 2:4). The verb *"leave"* means "give up, abandon, quit, desert, forsake, stop" (Zodhiates). The *"first love"* is expressed by a strong desire to be together, to love, please, care for and serve the beloved. They have abandoned their love for Jesus.

THOUGHT: How is my love for my Lord Jesus Christ?

PRAYER: Lord, please search me and let me know my shortcoming.

BETTER TO MAINTAIN OUR FIRST LOVE FOR CHRIST (3)

Lack of desire to be with the LORD: A couple in first love always think of, remember, and miss each other and find it a sweet, happy and blessed time to be together. How about our love for the Lord? Do we still have fervent zeal and passion to seek the Lord, and keep a close fellowship with Him in His light? Do we find it a blessed time to worship Him, hear His Word from the Scriptures and talk to Him in our prayers? While living in the world, do we desire *"to be with Christ"* (Phil 1:23) and *"love his appearing"* (2 Tim 4:8)? If we are doing our devotion and worship and service as a duty, routine or ritual while our heart is far from the Lord without any ardent love for Him, we have left our first love! It is serious if we have no desire to be with the Lord in prayer, personal devotion or worship!

Lack of love and care for the LORD, His Word, His Name and His Kingdom: A couple in first love do love each other and love the names and words of each other. One is not ashamed to introduce or mention one's loved one's name to others, and every time one receives the other's letter, one reads it again and again with joy. One feels hurt when the other is criticised or hurt. Do we love our Lord's Name and Word? (Ps 5:11; 119:97, 119, 127, 132, 159). Do we feel hurt and angry when our Lord's Name and Word are being criticised, twisted or blasphemed? Do we feel ashamed of His Name, Word and Kingdom? The couple in first love are willing to sacrifice their self-will and interest to please and care for each other. Do we try and seek to please the Lord or men? (Gal 1:10). The Lord Jesus confirms that he who loves Him must keep His commandments and His Word (John 14:21, 23). Are we living, worshipping and serving according to God's will and Word? Sadly, many are compromising their pure love for the Lord and His Word for the sake of being accepted, recognized, or popular! Do we really love the Lord and care for His Name, His Word and His Kingdom?

THOUGHT: *"... there is none... that I desire beside thee"* (Ps 73:25).

PRAYER: Lord, may Thy love constrain me to love Thee always.

BETTER TO MAINTAIN OUR FIRST LOVE FOR CHRIST (4)

Lack of love in serving the LORD: The couple in first love are willing to serve each other. We can serve without love, but we cannot be in love without serving. Love will prompt us to serve with willingness, zeal and sacrifice. It is vital for us to be constrained by Christ's love to live for Him and serve Him (2 Cor 5:14). The Bible tells us that *"Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her"* (Gen 29:20). Our Lord Jesus says, *"If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour"* (John 12:26). To serve Him faithfully, fruitfully, joyfully and meaningfully, the Lord still asks you and me individually as He asked Peter, *"lovest thou me more than these?"* (John 21:15). Do we love the Lord above all? Do we see it as a burden to attend a worship service, prayer meeting, or an evangelism session? The believers in Ephesus serve the Lord and labour hard, but without ardent love for Him. Our Lord Jesus has to rebuke them to bring them back to Himself.

Words of warning: The Lord Jesus says, *"Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent"* (Rev 2:5). There are three things our Lord requires us to do if we have left our first love:

(a) Remember from whence thou art fallen: Remember when we lacked the love for our Lord, for His Name, for His Word, and for His Kingdom. Remember how we lacked the desire to be with Him in prayer, in personal devotion, in reading His Word, in worship, and failed to walk with Him. Remember how we lacked godly courage to defend His Name and His Truth; how we failed to please Him, serve Him or wait for His soon return; and how we were ashamed to tell others about Him, to share His salvation with others, etc.

THOUGHT: Am I serving the Lord with love and joy?

PRAYER: Lord, please help me serve Thee with love and joy.

BETTER TO MAINTAIN OUR FIRST LOVE FOR CHRIST (5)

(b) Repent: Come back to the Lord in sorrow and repentance. Let us acknowledge our failure to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength (Mark 12:30); and how we have failed to do all things with love (1 Cor 16:14). Remember that we will be cursed if we fail to love the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 16:22), and that our church will be removed except we repent. God's Word of repentance for His people is always the same: *"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land"* (2 Chron 7:14).

(c) Do the first works: Come back to the Lord and obey His Word. The first works are what God wants us to do from His holy Word. *"And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength"* (Mark 12:30). The love for God can be seen in the believers. They *"... continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers... with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God... And when they had prayed... they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness... rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name... daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ... they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word... Then had the churches rest... and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied... they would cleave unto the Lord... they ministered to the Lord, and fasted... your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ... thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints"* (Acts 2:42, 46-47; 4:31; 5: 41-42; 8:4; 9:31; 11:23; 13:2; 1 Thess 1:3; Philem 5). What about us?

THOUGHT: It is always wise to repent and come back to the Lord.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to repent and come back to Thee.

BETTER TO BE FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH (1)

We honour faithful people because they are reliable, and we can trust them and work with them without any reservation or suspicion. A faithful man is not easy to find. The Bible says, *“Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find?”* (Prov 20:6). Many are faithful in the beginning, but in the end, due to temptations, difficulties or persecutions, they fail. Even in the church ministry, we have heard of many pastors or preachers who were very fundamental and faithful to the Lord and God’s Word in the beginning, but in the end they compromised and became men-pleasers. Many others have even left the ministry and returned to their secular work! Our Lord Jesus tells the parable of the sower: those seeds that fell on stony ground refer to those who hear God’s Word and immediately receive it with gladness, but later due to persecutions and tribulations or afflictions they are offended and fall away. It is not easy to be faithful to the Lord and His Word, even unto death. Truly, *“Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof”* (Eccles 7:8).

Among the seven churches in Asia Minor, only the churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia were not rebuked. Under the wicked reign of the emperors Nero (ruled AD 54–68) and Domitian (ruled AD 81–96), Christians in Smyrna were severely persecuted. Many Christians were forced to choose between “Caesar as Lord” or “Jesus as Lord.” To choose Jesus was to choose death! Our risen Lord Jesus Christ encouraged the persecuted Christians in Smyrna: *“be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life”* (Rev 2:10). Polycarp, a disciple of the Apostle John, a faithful leader in the church of Smyrna, suffered martyrdom in AD 155. Polycarp refused to deny his Lord Jesus, saying, “Eighty-six years I have served Him, and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?” What about us? Are we still faithful to the Lord and His Word in these last days of compromise, deception and apostasy?

THOUGHT: Be faithful to the Lord and His Word, even unto death.

PRAYER: Lord, help me and keep me faithful to Thee always.

BETTER TO BE FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH (2)

To a persecuted church, the Lord Jesus manifests Himself as *“the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive”* (Rev 2:8). In Revelation 1:8, Jesus says, *“I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.”* The Lord Jesus is the eternal, self-existent, almighty, faithful, living and true God of His people. He is the beginning and the end of all things. Before anything came into existence, Jesus was there; and after all things pass away, He will still be the same (re: Heb 13:8).

The Lord Jesus encourages His persecuted followers by His resurrection: *“which was dead, and is alive”* (Rev 2:8), *“I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death”* (Rev 1:18). Jesus is the living and almighty Saviour, who has overcome Satan, the world and death. Jesus faithfully obeyed His Father unto death, and did He lose anything? Absolutely not! The Lord Jesus is now alive with all glory, honour and power as Lord of lords and King of kings! Therefore, He is able to promise His followers, who are faithful until death, that they will *“receive the crown of life”* (James 1:12) and *“shall not be hurt of the second death”* (Rev 2:11).

The omniscient Jesus perfectly knows their *“works, and tribulation, and poverty”* (Rev 2:9). Being persecuted, some believers in Smyrna had to suffer martyrdom. Many others lost their jobs, and their land and houses were confiscated. They had to move from place to place. As a result, they became very poor materially, but our Lord knows that they were spiritually rich in Him. They kept themselves close to the Lord and enjoyed His sufficient grace, strength, comfort and encouragement. Our Lord knows everything. He knows our works, our troubles, our difficulties, our trials, our tribulations and our spiritual condition. He knows who the true or false Jews are, and who the true or professing Christians are.

THOUGHT: Jesus Christ is the victorious and risen Lord of lords!

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for overcoming all to be Lord of lords.

BETTER TO BE FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH (3)

The Lord Jesus says, *"behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days"* (Rev 2:10). The Lord Jesus does not only foreknow everything, He is also in control over everything. Nothing happens to God's children by accident. The Lord Jesus is sovereign! Satan uses persecutions to discourage believers from following the Lord, but it is the Lord who sovereignly allows Satan to trouble His children so that they *"may be tried"* for a limited length of time like *"ten days."* The Lord knows our strength and weakness, and *"God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able"* (1 Cor 10:13). God controls *"the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth"* (1 Pet 1:7).

"Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer" (Rev 2:10). Our Lord encouraged them not to fear any of the persecutions that they were about to suffer, as He taught His disciples: *"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell"* (Matt 10:28). Many are deceived by the wealth and health gospel today, preached by those who promise that believing in Jesus will make them successful, healthy, and wealthy! That is a different "Jesus"! Here is the true word from the true and living Saviour Jesus Christ: we will *"suffer"* as He had suffered unto death. *"Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?"* (Luke 24:26). In His ministry on earth, Jesus usually encouraged His followers: *"Fear not"* (Matt 10:28; Luke 5:10; 8:50; 12:7; etc.). Do we have any fear in our hearts today when thinking about our studies, work, ministry, families, troubles, illnesses, afflictions, difficulties, and trials, or the criticism, misunderstanding, misjudgment, hatred, and opposition from others for Jesus' sake? Just hear the words of encouragement from our risen Lord, *"Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer."*

THOUGHT: What must I do when I fear?

PRAYER: Lord, may Thy perfect love cast out all fear in my heart.

BETTER TO BE FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH (4)

The living and true God is *“the faithful God”* and *“faithful Creator”* who has kept His words and promises, especially His covenant with His people (Deut 7:9; Heb 11:11; 1 Pet 4:19). The Lord Jesus faithfully obeyed His Father even unto death and is *“the faithful and true witness”* (Rev 3:14) and *“a merciful and faithful high priest”* (Heb 2:17; 3:2) and is called *“Faithful and True”* (Rev 19:11). The fruit of the Holy Spirit is faith, which also means faithfulness, fidelity or loyalty (Gal 5:22), and God’s Word is *“the faithful word”* and is true, sure, trustworthy, believable, and *“worthy of all acceptation”* (Titus 1:9; 1 Tim 1:15; 3:1; 4:3; 2 Tim 2:11; 2 Pet 1:19; Rev 21:5; 22:6). Therefore, a truly born-again believer who is controlled by the Lord and God’s Word cannot be unfaithful, but he will persevere unto the end by the Lord’s sufficient grace and strength. Through God’s Word we know that God requires us to be faithful as He only uses, rewards and blesses the faithful: *“Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful”* (1 Cor 4:2; cf. 2 Tim 2:2), and *“Well done, thou good and faithful servant”* (Matt 25:21, 23).

Therefore, it is vital for us to be faithful to the Lord and His Word, even *“faithful in that which is least”* (Luke 16:10), and *“faithful in all things”* (1 Tim 3:11), faithful in preaching God’s Word without any addition or subtraction (Jer 23:28), and faithful in using the talents God has given to us for His service and Kingdom (Matt 25:14-23). In the past, we might be faithful in praying, studying God’s Word, worshipping, sharing God’s Word with others, and doing God’s Word, but how about today? We might start well with zeal and diligence, but are we still pressing on faithfully? Are we still *“faithful in all things”* and ready to be *“faithful unto death”* for *“the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ”* (Rev 1:9)? How we need God’s grace and strength to be faithful unto death!

THOUGHT: Am I faithful in all things, even in that which is least?

PRAYER: Lord, keep me faithful to Thee in all things unto death.

BETTER NOT TO COMPROMISE (1)

Many churches nowadays are compromising. They are not serious in dealing with sins, worldliness and wrong doctrines. No matter how big and prosperous their churches are, the holy and righteous Lord will never condone sin, worldliness and anything against His will and Word. The Lord Jesus used His Word to expose and fight against the wrong doctrines and sinful practices of the church in Pergamos, and His Word is still applicable for all the churches and for each one of us today. We cannot ignore or condone unbiblical doctrines and sinful practices in our lives and in the church!

To a compromising church, the Lord Jesus manifested Himself as the holy and valiant God, who *“hath the sharp sword with two edges”* (Rev 2:12) and *“out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword”* (Rev 1:16). The Lord created the heaven and the earth and everything in it by the words from His mouth (Gen 1; Heb 11:3). How powerful His Word is! *“For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast”* (Ps 33:9). The Sword of the Spirit is the Word of God (Eph 6:17). Truly, *“For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart”* (Heb 4:12). When God uses His powerful and holy Word to fight against His enemies and to judge sinners, who can stand before Him? Definitely none! *“And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron”* (Rev 19:15).

We must believe, trust and submit ourselves to God’s Word, which is the perfect, final and divine standard and foundation of the Christian faith, doctrine, beliefs, convictions, practices, worship, service, ministry and spiritual warfare. Moreover, we must be faithful to our Lord and His Word, without any compromise at all!

THOUGHT: *“I the LORD search the heart”* (Jer 17:10).

PRAYER: Lord, search my heart and let me see it as Thou seest it.

BETTER NOT TO COMPROMISE (2)

To the church in Pergamos, the omniscient Lord said that He not only knew their works but also where they lived, even *"where Satan's seat (throne)"* was, as they lived in a political and religious city which was full of idolatry and immorality. Our Lord praised them for their faith in Him, *"and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith."* When compelled to choose between "Caesar as Lord" or "Jesus as Lord," the believers in Pergamos chose Jesus and did not deny their faith in Him; and because of this, Antipas was a faithful martyr (Rev 2:13). Jesus still expects us today to hold fast His name and His Word even unto death.

However, Jesus had a few things against them: *"But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate"* (Rev 2:14-15). Jesus did not ignore wrong doctrines or sinful practices. He *"cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple"* and said to them, *"My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves,"* then *"he left them,"* and did not worship with them (Matt 21:12-13, 17). He rebuked the Jewish leaders severely for their hypocrisy, wrong teachings and iniquities (Matt 23). He rebuked the believers in Pergamos for their tolerance of wrong doctrines and sinful practices. They failed to discipline and stop those who held the doctrine of Balaam or the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. Why? They were compromising to please men!

It is sad that the same thing is happening in many churches today! They do not stop those who hold wrong doctrines for fear that the funds of the church may be affected. Their own wealth, position, power, or popularity may also be affected. What about you?

THOUGHT: Compromising God's Truth leads to spiritual downfall.

PRAYER: Lord, help me stand for Thy Truth without compromise.

BETTER NOT TO COMPROMISE (3)

Balaam was a false prophet and a hireling. He professed that he honoured God's Word and that the LORD was his God: *“I cannot go beyond the word of the LORD my God”* (Num 22:18). Yet, he was prepared to go against God's will, even to curse His people, to gain earthly promotion, honour and wealth. He was not God's true servant, nor did he have a heart for God's people. When God's wrath was upon Israel for their great sin of worshiping the golden calf, Moses prayed to God, *“Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin-; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written”* (Exod 32:32). The Apostle Paul had the same mind, saying, *“For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh”* (Rom 9:3). But Balaam neither had a right spirit nor a good heart for God's people!

Balak, king of Moab, *“saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. And Moab was sore afraid”* and *“was distressed because of the children of Israel.”* So he sent his messengers to Balaam, saying, *“Come now therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people; for they are too mighty for me”* (Num 22:2, 3, 6). If Balaam were a true servant of the Lord, he would have rejected Balak's suggestion right away, but his heart was tempted by earthly gains, so he said to Balak's men, *“Lodge here this night, and I will bring you word again, as the LORD shall speak unto me”* (Num 22:8). The Lord asked him, *“What men are these with thee?”* (Num 22:9). The Lord knew who they were, but He wanted Balaam to realise what ungodly guests and friends he had in his home! The Lord said clearly to Balaam, *“Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed”* (Num 22:12). However, when Balak sent more princes with more honour, wealth and reward, Balaam asked the Lord for His will again! Balaam hoped that God would change His mind and let him curse His people! Thus, God gave him up to his corrupt mind and evil way which led only to destruction!

THOUGHT: God's true servants must have a heart for His people.

PRAYER: Lord, please fill my heart with love for Thy people.

BETTER NOT TO COMPROMISE (4)

God is good and gracious to His children and people, and He stopped Balaam from cursing His people. Then Balaam counselled Balak to seduce the children of Israel into committing “*trespass against the LORD*” (Num 31:16) by committing fornication, eating food sacrificed to idols and bowing down to their gods. And “*the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel... And those that died in the plague were twenty and four thousand*” (Num 25:3, 9). However, the children of Israel repented, and God helped them to defeat the Midianites, and Balaam was killed with the sword (Num 31:7-8).

The Bible warns against “*the doctrine of Balaam*” (Rev 2:14), “*the way of Balaam... who loved the wages of unrighteousness*” (2 Pet 2:15) and “*the error of Balaam for reward*” (Jude 11). Today, we can see many Balaams in churches. They are not true servants of the Lord, but hirelings, false pastors and preachers! They profess that the LORD is their God, but go against God’s will and God’s Word: “*they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things*” (Phil 3:18-19). Many claim they are serving the Lord but do not believe nor submit themselves to the authority of God’s divinely preserved Word! They ignore the doctrine of Biblical Separation and compromise and make friends with the ungodly, using their “*liberty for a cloke of maliciousness*” (1 Pet 2:16). They even invite popular but ungodly speakers to be their guest speakers and ungodly singers with contemporary music, to attract more people to their church for worldly gains! Today, the doctrine of Balaam is seen in worldly methods of church growth, compromise and tolerance towards sin, ungodliness, idolatry, immorality, homosexuality and same-sex marriage for earthly gains. All these are contrary to God’s Word and teaching (Acts 15:29). The leaders of these churches even want to curse God’s true children and servants as heretics or enemies.

THOUGHT: To serve God for material blessings is being a hireling.

PRAYER: Lord, help me serve Thee unconditionally out of love.

BETTER NOT TO COMPROMISE (5)

The church in Pergamos tolerated not only those who held the doctrine of Balaam but also those who held the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which the holy Lord Jesus hates (Rev 2:15). The Lord approves the right attitude of the church in Ephesus, *“that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate”* (Rev 2:6). Sadly, it became a doctrine in the church in Pergamos! They had gone away from God’s holy Word so quickly! In Ephesus, the brethren hated the deeds of the professing “Christians” who lived in ungodliness, worldliness and immorality disregarding God’s words and godly rules. But in Pergamos the “believers” were taught that they were still saved despite their ungodly, worldly and immoral life! But the holy Lord hates it! What about you? Do you truly hate sins, ungodliness, worldliness and wrong doctrines?

The doctrine of the Nicolaitans is similar to the teaching that once you are saved by God’s grace, you may do whatever you like. You may teach and preach whatever you and the hearers like, you may worship and serve the Lord any way you like, and you may preach messages that are soothing to the ears but disregard God’s holiness and righteousness, ignoring sins, wrong doctrines, hypocrisy, immorality, ungodliness, worldliness, homosexuality, etc. Many today are compromising, even for the sake of “love and unity”! Are you in such a church?

Jesus says, *“Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth”* (Rev 2:16). Can any survive the Lord’s fighting against him? Definitely not! *“He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day”* (John 12:48). This is a serious warning to those who criticise and twist God’s Word to serve their own beliefs, doctrines and practices! Will you repent?

THOUGHT: The Lord hates sins, ungodliness and false doctrines.

PRAYER: Lord, help me hate what Thou hatest.

BETTER TO KEEP ONESELF HOLY (1)

We must thank God that while we were dead in sins and trespasses, He has graciously quickened us, and delivered us from the power of sin and darkness. He has brought us to His kingdom of light, given us new life in Jesus Christ, and continues His good work of sanctification in our lives, until our Lord Jesus comes back again. All this is by His love, grace and mercy alone. While we are still living in this world of darkness and sin, Satan works hard to tempt, seduce, threaten, discourage or persecute God's children and servants to cool off their love for the Lord, to give up their faith, to compromise, tolerate or indulge in sins, worldliness, ungodliness, immorality, or wrong doctrines.

Although the church in Ephesus left her first love, she hated wrong doctrines and sinful practices, which were tolerated in the church in Pergamos and were taught and practised in the church in Thyatira! What a decline! Without Biblical Separation, a church will gradually turn to compromise, tolerance, indulgence, and then apostasy without being aware! God commanded His people to separate from sins; otherwise, He would not be with them any more (Josh 7:12)!

The sinful environment in Thyatira with sexual immorality and idolatry did affect the church there. A certain woman known as *“Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess”* (Rev 2:20) taught and seduced believers to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed unto idols, conforming to the paganism and sexual immorality of their surroundings. And the holy Lord Jesus Christ, with His *“eyes like unto a flame of fire”* (Rev 2:18), had to rebuke this church for her ungodliness, immorality and idolatry. Although we are living in this sinful world full of ungodliness, immorality and idolatry, we must *“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).

THOUGHT: Biblical Separation is a must to enjoy God's presence.

PRAYER: Lord, separate me unto Thyself.

BETTER TO KEEP ONESELF HOLY (2)

The Lord Jesus manifests Himself as *“the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass”* (Rev 2:18). When proclaiming that He is the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ reminds us that He is the very God, equal with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, who is eternal, glorious, holy, righteous, gracious, unchangeable, all-powerful, all-wise, all-knowing, all-present. And He is worthy to receive our reverence, honour, love, trust, worship, adoration, praise, thanksgiving, obedience and submission.

The Lord Jesus has *“his eyes like unto a flame of fire”* (Rev 2:18), reminding us of His holiness and His thorough searching. Nothing can be hidden from Him. *“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). We are so much comforted to learn that when the Lord Jesus *“saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them”* (Matt 9:36), and He graciously *“looked upon Peter”* after he had denied his Master thrice, and Peter remembered Jesus’ Word and repented bitterly (Luke 22:61). That is a look of grace and mercy! Truly, *“Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD”* (Gen 6:8).

However, we should remember that the Lord is holy and also has a holy look like a flame of fire. The Lord Jesus sees everything, searches the innermost part of our thinking, motives and hearts, and is angry to see any sin, idolatry, or immorality there. To the ungodly Jewish leaders, the Lord Jesus *“had looked round about on them with anger; being grieved for the hardness of their hearts”* (Mark 3:5). To the church in Thyatira, the Lord looked at them with His holy and searching eyes, and rebuked them for committing fornication and eating things sacrificed to idols! What does the Lord see in our minds, hearts, lives, families, church and ministry?

THOUGHT: The Lord’s holy and searching eyes are everywhere.

PRAYER: Lord, help me live before Thy holy eyes always.

BETTER TO KEEP ONESELF HOLY (3)

The Lord Jesus also has *“his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace”* (Rev 1:15; 2:18). This reminds us of the fire’s heat, energy, firmness, power and brightness, indicating the zeal, sureness, power, glory and victory of our Lord’s walk and acts in His Church and in this world. No one and nothing can stop His walk or hinder His work. To the church in Thyatira, our Lord says that He will *“cast her... and them... into great tribulation”* (Rev 2:22) and *“kill... searcheth... give unto every one of you according to your works”* (Rev 2:23). What the Lord has said, He has fulfilled, is fulfilling and will surely fulfil quickly. Shall we not wisely fear our Lord and submit to Him and His Word?

The Lord says, *“I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first”* (Rev 2:19). It is a blessing if we hear our Lord’s words of encouragement to us and to our church. But are we faithful?

However, the holy Lord also says, *“Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols”* (Rev 2:20). The term *“sufferest”* here means “permit, allow, not to hinder,” and the term *“seduce”* means “mislead, deceive, lead astray” (Zodhiates). It is sad and frightening that they allowed a woman named Jezebel to teach them and mislead them into thinking that it was not a serious sin to commit fornication or to eat things sacrificed to idols as it was a norm in their society! Paul had to write to the believers in Corinth, a city of immorality and idolatry: *“Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body”* (1 Cor 6:13), and *“the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils”* (1 Cor 10: 20). What about you?

THOUGHT: The holy Lord is against sin, ungodliness and idolatry.

PRAYER: Lord, please fill me with Thy holy presence and zeal.

BETTER TO KEEP ONESELF HOLY (4)

The name Jezebel reminds us of a very wicked woman in the Old Testament. She was *“the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians”* (1 Kings 16:31), the wife of Ahab, king of Israel. There are at least four wicked characteristics in her: (1) She did not fear God, the covenant LORD of Israel. She *“slew the prophets of the LORD”* (1 Kings 18:13) and *“the servants of the LORD”* (2 Kings 9:7). (2) She was zealous in pagan worship and idolatry. She had 450 prophets of Baal and 400 of Astarte, who *“eat at Jezebel’s table”* (1 Kings 18:19), and *“the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many”* (2 Kings 9:22). (3) She dominated and corrupted her husband to do evil (1 Kings 21:25). (4) She did not respect God’s law. *“She wrote letters in Ahab’s name, and sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters unto the elders”* to kill Naboth with false witnesses in order to take Naboth’s vineyard, even his fathers’ inheritance (1 Kings 21:8-16).

Now, the woman Jezebel (who called herself a prophetess, a spokesperson of God, and was allowed to teach and to lead the church of Thyatira astray from God’s Word and Truth) had the same characteristics. She did not fear God nor the Lord Jesus Christ, and *“calleft herself a prophetess”* (Rev 2:20) which was totally a big lie. She dominated the man’s role of leadership, *“to teach”* unbiblical doctrines (Rev 2:20). She was zealous in idolatry and immorality, and seduced Jesus’ *“servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols”* (Rev 2:20). She did not respect God’s Word nor repent of her sins. *“I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not”* (Rev 2:21). We can see these same characteristics in those who claim themselves as God’s servants nowadays but ignore God’s holy Word, promote charismaticism, neo-evangelicalism, and ecumenism which lead to the one-world religion, misleading many into accepting all kinds of beliefs, unbiblical doctrines and convictions, idolatry, immorality, homosexuality, etc.

THOUGHT: I must be watchful against false prophets and teachers.

PRAYER: Lord, grant me a discerning spirit against all deception.

BETTER TO KEEP ONESELF HOLY (5)

To some faithful believers in Thyatira, the Lord says, “*But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak*” (Rev 2:24). These faithful believers knew and submitted themselves to God’s Word and Truth, so they could discern what was true and false, and what was of God and of Satan. They faithfully kept God’s Word and “*have not this doctrine*” — not to accept nor hold the false teachings of Jezebel. They “*have not known the depths of Satan.*” The verb “*know*” in Greek *ginoisko* has several meanings according to the context: to know by gaining knowledge (John 8:32; Rom 1:21), to know by trial (John 7:51), to know from others (Mark 5:43), to know with perception (Matt 22:18), to know with understanding (Matt 13:11), to know with acknowledgement (Matt 7:23), to know with personal fellowship (John 17:3), to know with approval (John 10:27; Rom 7:15), to know with sexual relationship (Luke 1:34). “*Depths*” in Greek *bathos* “*metaphorically meaning profoundness, inscrutability, abstruseness, secret...*” (Zodhiates). Thus, according to this context, the faithful believers in Thyatira did not approve what Jezebel and her followers spoke as very deep, profound, and secret teachings. They were not deceived by the deep deception of Satan, who misled Eve into thinking that eating the forbidden fruit was not a sin but a hidden blessing to be wise and to become as gods!

Jezebel and her followers were deceived by Satan into thinking that immorality and idolatry was not a sin and that they were very close to God! However, the Lord, the Son of God, with “*his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass*” (Rev 2:18) would surely bring them to His judgment. “*Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation... I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works*” (Rev 2:22-23). What about you?

THOUGHT: I must be watchful and prayerful against the Devil.

PRAYER: Lord, keep me watchful and prayerful against the Devil.

BETTER TO KEEP ONESELF HOLY (6)

The Lord says to the faithful believers, *“But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come”* (Rev 2:24-25). The Lord did not put upon faithful believers any other burden except that they should hold fast what they already had till He comes: their *“works, and charity, and service, and faith, and... patience... and the last to be more than the first”* (Rev 2:19).

Satan’s deception is so deep and subtle that without the Spirit of Truth and the Word of Truth, many have been deceived unawares! How we need the Holy Spirit and God’s Word with Biblical Separation! Compromise and tolerance towards sin, ungodliness, worldliness and wrong doctrines step by step will make Christians’ spiritual discernment dull to a stage that they will not see their sins and ungodliness. They will even be very proud of their exciting worship and prosperous church with big membership!

Sadly, many professing Christians and leaders today are also deceived by Satan unawares into thinking that they are very close to God while their heart, life, and worship are full of worldliness, ungodliness, immorality, idolatry, etc. It is deceiving to think that they are so close to the Lord when they worship Him with all their “heart, soul, mind, and strength” in waving and clapping their hands, jumping, shouting, and moving their bodies to the rhythm of loud music with electric guitars and drums! It is deceiving to think that they are God’s servants just because many like to hear their messages and that their mega churches are blessed with prosperity, success and fast growth! They have been deceived by *“the depths of Satan”* (Rev 2:24) unawares! Thus, it is wise to keep ourselves, our families and our church separate and holy as God is holy (re: 2 Cor 6:17). What about you?

THOUGHT: *“Be ye holy; for I am holy”* (1 Pet 1:16).

PRAYER: Lord, please keep me holy as Thou art holy.

TUESDAY, MARCH 1

JOHN 6:53-71

JOHN 6:63

*“...the words that I speak unto you,
they are spirit, and they are life.”*

BETTER TO BE ALIVE IN CHRIST (1)

What does it mean to be a living church? Many, deceived by their own feelings, say, “We go to that church because it is full of life! It is exciting and interesting. The church is always crowded. The preaching and singing are powerful. There are many sign gifts and various church activities! It is so fun. We feel good, happy and edified!” And when they attend a Bible-centred worship service, without contemporary music, they are like fish out of water and they feel bored and uncomfortable. They say, “Your worship service is so boring. There’s no life at all!” “Life” to them is energy, excitement, zeal, actions, and noise! They are not able to discern the difference between “life” in the flesh and “life” in the Holy Spirit! We must not be deceived by our own feelings, by the environment, or by the majority!

A living church must have spiritually living members in Christ (according to God’s Word) who have the guidance of the Holy Spirit. If the Lord Jesus is not the centre of worship, there will be no life. *“He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life”* (1 John 5:12). If God’s Word is not the centre of worship, there will be no life. And *“the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life”* (John 6:63). If the worshippers do not humbly trust in the Holy Spirit to worship God in spirit and in truth according to God’s will and way, but trust in their ability, resources and plans, there will be no life. *“It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing”* (John 6:63). Knowing this truth, we shall *“have no confidence in the flesh”* (Phil 3:3). We must humbly trust in the Lord Jesus, His Word and the Holy Spirit, without whom, our worship, singing, praying and preaching are in vain! The Lord Jesus rebuked the church in Sardis because she only had a name, a reputation in the past, while she is now dead! What about us?

THOUGHT: Am I truly alive spiritually before God?

PRAYER: Lord, I am alive by Thee, Thy Spirit and Thy Word.

BETTER TO BE ALIVE IN CHRIST (2)

To a dead church, the Lord Jesus manifests Himself as *"he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars"* (Rev 3:1). The number seven is the number of perfection. In the book of Revelation, we come across seven churches, seven candlesticks, seven seals, seven eyes, seven angels, seven trumpets, seven vials, etc.

The seven spirits (Rev 3:1): The Lord Jesus has the seven Spirits of God, and this does not mean that He has seven different Spirits, but one Holy Spirit with His perfect fullness. The Bible says, *"And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him (Jesus), 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). Here we see one Holy Spirit, who is (1) the Spirit of the LORD, (2) the Spirit of wisdom, (3) the Spirit of understanding, (4) the Spirit of counsel, (5) the Spirit of might, (6) the Spirit of knowledge, and (7) the Spirit of the fear of the LORD; and He rests upon the Lord Jesus Christ with His perfect fullness. The Bible confirms, *"For he (Jesus) whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him"* (John 3:34).

The seven stars (Rev 1:20) refer to the seven messengers or the seven servants of the Lord. The Lord has the perfect fullness of the Holy Spirit, the source of all spiritual life. His servants, who belong to Him, are sent to churches to convey His message.

May the Lord help us to realize that we must always be attached to the risen Lord, our spiritual Life (as the branch is to the vine), all the time and with our full trust, dependence and submission. *"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). May the Lord also help us to faithfully convey His exact message from His Word to His people.

THOUGHT: The Lord Jesus has the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

PRAYER: Lord, please keep me filled with the Holy Spirit.

BETTER TO BE ALIVE IN CHRIST (3)

The Lord Jesus has no word of praise for the church in Sardis, except for *"a few names ... which have not defiled their garments"* (Rev 3:4). To the rest, our Lord rebuked them. *"I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead... for I have not found thy works perfect before God"* (Rev 3:1-2). What about us? Do we have only a name, while we are spiritually dead or unfaithful? Many fundamental churches and Bible colleges and theological seminaries used to have a good name and reputation, and were full of spiritual life and truth, but now are dead! Even Christian countries, like the United Kingdom, America, New Zealand and Australia, used to have God's Word in parliament, schools and hospitals, but not anymore. Even if some have, they are dead because very few bother to read God's Word with reverence! They used to send missionaries to preach the pure Gospel of life, but it is now replaced with the social gospel! They used to be godly, but are now compromising, immoral and idolatrous. Step by step, they follow the ungodly trend of the world, condoning homosexuality and same-sex marriage! This is due to a lack of biblical separation and a failure to emphasize holy living!

How about the worship service? Is it full of the worshippers' love, gratitude, and reverence toward God? Or has it become a routine? Or is it for entertainment? Is the message full of God's Word, preached with trust, submission and reverence? Or is it full of man's words: quotations of men, interesting stories and personal experiences? Many sing to the Lord with their lips and feelings while their hearts are far from Him and His Word! The Lord Jesus says, *"in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men"* (Matt 15:9). How about evangelism, fellowship groups and church activities? Are they according to God's Word and way? Or are they according to man's will and worldly ways? Without God's presence and approval, all are dead! *"I have not found thy works perfect before God"* (Rev 3:2).

THOUGHT: Are my works found perfect before God?

PRAYER: Lord, please let me know my works as Thou knowest.

BETTER TO BE ALIVE IN CHRIST (4)

The Lord Jesus warned the dead church in Sardis through five commandments: (1) Be watchful, (2) Strengthen the things which remain, (3) Remember how thou hast received and heard, (4) Hold fast, and (5) Repent.

Be watchful: This command is in the present tense, denoting a continuous action: “Keep on becoming watchful.” Are we watchful? Here our Lord does not mean our physical alertness, as when He asked His disciples to watch and pray with Him in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt 26:40-41). Here He is referring to our spiritual alertness. We have to arise from our sleepy spirit and be spiritually alert to make sure that our personal life, family life, church life and ministry are perfect before God, and are not in spiritual slumber!

May the Lord help us examine ourselves to see if our works are perfect before Him. Are our personal lives perfect before God as “*a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God*” (Rom 12:1)? Have we carefully watched our words, behaviour, conduct and ministry to make sure that it is perfect and blameless before God? Have we used our time wisely and effectively according to God’s will (Eph 5:15-17) in study, work, worship, and ministry? Have we diligently and fervently prayed to the Lord for ourselves, for our loved ones, for pastors and brethren, and for our church to be found faithful to Him and His Word? Have we served the Lord faithfully in teaching and preaching with much prayer and proper preparation? Have we been watchful to guard ourselves, our loved ones, and our church from Satan’s attacks, worldly temptations and wrong doctrines? Have we been watchful to prepare ourselves and our loved ones and our church for the soon coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? Have we done everything with love, whole-heartedly as unto the Lord and to His glory? (1 Cor 10:31; 16:14; Col 3:23). If not, our works are not perfect before God!

THOUGHT: Am I watchful to do my works perfectly before God?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to do my works whole-heartedly for Thee.

BETTER TO BE ALIVE IN CHRIST (5)

Strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die: The Lord commands us to strengthen and establish what remains in our spiritual life that is about to die: our faith in Him and His Word, our zeal and love for Him, His Word, His church and His kingdom, our service to Him and His church, our ministry to the brethren and to the lost, etc. How can we be strengthened so that our faith, spiritual life and ministry do not die?

We must humbly seek the Lord in prayer and in meditation of His Word. This is the experience from the prophet Daniel. *"For how can the servant of this my lord talk with this my lord? for as for me, straightway there remained no strength in me, neither is there breath left in me. Then there came again and touched me one like the appearance of a man, and he strengthened me, And said, O man greatly beloved, fear not: peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong. And when he had spoken unto me, I was strengthened, and said, Let my lord speak; for thou hast strengthened me"* (Dan 10:17-19). Only the Lord and His Word can strengthen us!

Paul also shared his experience: *"And he (Jesus) said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me"* (2 Cor 12:9). Even when Paul was left alone, *"At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me... Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion"* (2 Tim 4:16-17). No matter how weak we are, our Lord Jesus' grace is sufficient to strengthen us to do His will and His work so long as we humbly depend on Him, trust in Him and submit to Him. *"But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble"* (James 4:6).

THOUGHT: Only God and His Word can strengthen me spiritually.

PRAYER: Lord, please strengthen me with Thy Word and grace.

BETTER TO BE ALIVE IN CHRIST (6)

Remember how thou hast received and heard: This refers to the Word of God. This command is also in the present tense, meaning: "Keep on remembering." We have received and heard God's Word, but do we still remember it, keep on thinking about it and doing it?

Hold fast: This command is also in the present tense, meaning: "Keep on holding fast, observing" God's Word, faith in Him and His Word. Are we holding fast to God's Word and our faith in Him and His Word without letting it go?

Repent: If we only have a name but are without works, and if our works are not perfect before the Lord, if we are not watchful, and if we do not remember God's Word, hold it fast or keep it, then we have to come back to the Lord in repentance. Otherwise, *"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). What about you?

With these five commands, Jesus also has a word of encouragement for us. Thank God that there were still a few faithful believers in Sardis, and they *"have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy"* (Rev 3:4). Their spiritual garments were not defiled by *"evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man"* (Mark 7:21-23), nor by evil tongues (James 3:8), nor by *"unbelieving"* (Titus 1:15) nor by *"bitterness"* (Heb 12:15). And surely, their spiritual garments were washed and made *"white in the blood of the Lamb"* (Rev 7:14). That is why they were worthy to walk with their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. What about our spiritual garments? It is a blessed privilege to walk with our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in His light and to be kept clean and white in His blood.

THOUGHT: Will I be found watchful in white when Christ comes?

PRAYER: Lord, keep me watchful, pure and white for Thy coming.

BETTER TO KEEP GOD’S WORD (1)

People usually learn their costly lessons when they put their trust in man, his words and his promises. The Psalmist wisely puts his trust in the Lord and His Word. *“It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man... in princes”* (Ps 118:8-9), *“I trust in thy word”* (Ps 119:42). Among ungodly people and lies, *“them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie,”* the church in Philadelphia was encouraged to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and His Word and to hold fast what they had because He is holy, true, sovereign and almighty. The Lord Jesus manifested Himself as *“he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth”* (Rev 3:7).

Jesus is holy: As He is holy, His name is holy (Ps 111:9), His Word is holy (2 Tim 3:15), His promise is holy (Ps 105:42), all His works are holy (Ps 145:17), His law is holy and His commandment is holy (Rom 7:12). Thus, the Lord Jesus cannot make mistakes and His Word cannot have any mistakes. We are to fear Him and honour His Word. We can wholeheartedly put our trust in Him and His Word without any doubt, reservation, regret or apology.

Jesus is true: The Lord is true because He is the living and true God (Jer 10:10; 1 Thess 1:9; 1 John 5:20), the true Light (John 1:9), the true Bread from heaven (John 6:32), the true Vine (John 15:1), the true Witness (Rev 3:14), and is called *“Faithful and True”* (Rev 19:11). Moreover, His Word is true (Ps 119:160), His record/testimony is true (John 8:14), His judgment is true (John 8:16; Rev 16:7), and His ways are true (Rev 15:3). Satan, the father of lies and the god of this world, disguised himself as *“an angel of light”* to deceive many (2 Cor 4:4; 11:14). On the other hand, the Lord Jesus is the living and true God who cannot lie. We shall not regret or be disappointed when we trust in Him and in His true Word.

THOUGHT: It is better to trust in Jesus Christ, who is holy and true.

PRAYER: Lord, only Thou art holy and true. Help me trust in Thee.

BETTER TO KEEP GOD’S WORD (2)

Jesus has the key of David: Jesus *“hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth”* (Rev 3:7). As *“the kingdom of our father David”* (Mark 11:10) refers to the Messianic kingdom under the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who shall sit on the *“throne of... David”* (Luke 1:32), *“the key of David”* refers to the key of the Lord’s kingdom. *“And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open”* (Isa 22:22). Thus, the Lord Jesus Christ is sovereign and almighty, and no one and nothing can hinder or stop what He is doing according to His will, purpose and pleasure. Truly, *“all power is given”* unto Him in heaven and in earth (Matt 28:18), and we can put our trust in Him, His work and His timing. We can wait upon Him with our full dependence and submission.

When we feel helpless and hopeless in our life, study, work, family or ministry, what should we do? Many do not want to learn the lesson of humility and submission in waiting upon the Lord’s sovereign will, way and timing. They are willing to compromise God’s Word and Truth to extend their own “kingdom” in worldly ways! May the Lord help us to patiently and humbly wait upon Him and to look unto Him, who has the key to open a door for us in His right time. The Lord Jesus did not rebuke the faithful believers in Philadelphia but encouraged them. *“I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name”* (Rev 3:8). The verb “keep” in Greek means *“obey, observe, fulfill a duty, precept, law, ... watchfully, vigilantly”* (Zodhiates). The Lord was pleased with His followers’ faithfulness in keeping His Word. They did not deny His name even though they had little strength in an ungodly and hostile environment where *“the synagogue of Satan”* was.

THOUGHT: When the almighty Lord opens, no one can shut.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to wait upon Thee for Thy open door.

BETTER TO KEEP GOD'S WORD (3)

The believers in Philadelphia faithfully kept God's Word. This shows their love for the Lord. *"If a man love me, he will keep my words"* (John 14:23). They not only kept God's Word but also kept it with endurance. *"Because thou hast kept the word of my patience (endurance)..."* (Rev 3:10). This means they followed the steps of their Master, who endured all things unto death. They were willing to endure all things including trials, sufferings, persecutions, and temptations to keep/obey God's Word without giving up their faith in Him or in His Word. Neither did they deny His name!

Do we truly love the Lord and keep/obey His Word with faith and perseverance no matter what may happen to us? It is so encouraging to hear the words from the Lord: *"I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it"* (Rev 3:8). The Bible tells us that Paul and Barnabas *"rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles"* (Acts 14:27). Paul acknowledged the Lord's work. *"For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries"* (1 Cor 16:9), and *"a door was opened unto me of the Lord"* (2 Cor 2:12). He asked the believers in Colossae to pray for him: *"Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds"* (Col 4:3). It is always good for us to remember that it is the Lord who opens a door for us to serve Him so that we may not be proud and think that it is due to our efforts, ability, cleverness, or sacrifice.

Then, the Lord encouraged them: *"Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown"* (Rev 3:11). This verb is an active command in the present tense. It means to "keep on holding fast." What were they to keep on holding fast to? It is their little strength, their faithfulness and perseverance in keeping God's Word and their public confession of Jesus' name. What about you?

THOUGHT: Do I keep God's Word with faith and endurance?

PRAYER: Lord, help me keep Thy Word with faith and endurance.

BETTER TO KEEP GOD’S WORD (4)

The Lord promised: *“Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee”* (Rev 3:9). Only God is worthy to receive our worship (John 4:23-24; Rev 4:10; 14:7). The angels dared not receive man’s worship (Rev 19:10; 22:9), neither did Peter, Paul and Barnabas (Acts 10:25-26; 14:11-18). Thus, the Lord was not requiring the false Jews to come and worship, but to come and respect the faithful believers in Philadelphia. The term *“worship”* in Greek means “to kiss toward someone, to throw a kiss in token of respect. The ancient oriental (especially Persian) mode of salutation between persons of equal rank was to kiss each other on the lips. When the difference of rank was light, they kissed each other on the cheek. When one was much inferior, he fell upon his knees and touched his forehead to the ground, throwing kisses toward the superior to show his great respect” (Zodhiates).

It is so encouraging to know that some day our Lord Jesus will cause those who have despised, hated, and persecuted us to come and give their great respect to us and know that He has loved us! The Lord also promised: *“Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth”* (Rev 3:10). The word *“temptation”* here in Greek (*peirasmós*) also means “trial...for the purpose of proving someone” (Zodhiates). The Lord confirms that temptation, trial, or testing will come upon all the world to try/prove them that dwell upon the earth. (This refers to the seven-year Tribulation after the rapture of believers.) *“Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall”* (1 Cor 10:12). Be sure that we are truly children of God. We do not know what may happen to us tomorrow, but the Lord knows. If we humbly trust in Him and keep His Word with perseverance, He will keep us from that hour of trial as He has promised. Thanks and praise be to the Lord!

THOUGHT: It is better to be loved and preserved by the Lord.

PRAYER: Lord, help me appreciate Thy love and preservation most.

BETTER TO KEEP GOD'S WORD (5)

It is so vital to keep God's Word with endurance until the end or unto death to enjoy His blessings. Many tried to keep God's Word in their life and in their ministry for a while, and then they gave up when they faced temptations, trials and persecutions. Many others deceived themselves by thinking that they were keeping God's Word when actually they were only keeping some selected parts of God's Word that suited their lives, their church and their ministry! King Saul is an example. He said to Samuel, *"Blessed be thou of the LORD: I have performed the commandment of the LORD"* (1 Sam 15:13). But he had only partly kept God's Word. So, God rejected him. *"Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king"* (1 Sam 15:23). It is serious!

We must make sure that we are keeping all of God's Word wholeheartedly. The fundamental step is to totally submit to the authority of God's Word without any doubt, question, argument, twist, criticism, addition, subtraction, modification, misinterpretation and mistranslation. Many modern-day Bible societies and Bible translators are not faithfully translating from the traditional Masoretic Hebrew Text and the Greek Textus Receptus Texts (which underlie the King James Bible). Instead they used the Westcott and Hort Texts which have about 9,970 Greek words omitted and modified!

Surely, the holy, true, sovereign and almighty Lord is not happy at all when His Word is not kept carefully and wholeheartedly. For example, *"Christ"* is omitted over thirty times (Matt 23:8; John 4:42; Acts 16:31; Rom 1:16; Phil 4:13; Rev 1:9; etc.); *"but by every word of God"* is omitted in Luke 4:4; *"God"* is replaced with *"He"* in 1 Timothy 3:16, undermining the Deity of Christ. 1 John 5:7, which confirms the Trinity of God, is omitted. And many others. It is better to keep and obey all the words of God.

THOUGHT: God is honourable, and His Word must be honourable.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to honour Thee and Thy Word always.

SATURDAY, MARCH 12

ACTS 26:12-23

ACTS 26:16

*“... I have appeared unto thee
for this purpose, to make thee
a minister and a witness...”*

BETTER TO KEEP GOD’S WORD (6)

When recording God’s Word, Luke carefully and diligently obtained the truth from the *“eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word”* (Luke 1:2). *“Minister”* here in Greek means a “subordinate, servant, attendant, or assistant in general. The subordinate official who waits to accomplish the commands of his superior” (Zodhiates). In other words, ministers of the Word are those who truly submit themselves to the authority of God’s Word. Jesus says, *“My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence”* (John 18:36). The Lord Jesus’ servants must be those who submit themselves to His authority.

The Lord Jesus called Paul to serve Him. He said, *“... I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee”* (Acts 26:16). The Lord Jesus expected Paul to submit himself to His authority and to the authority of His Word that Paul would receive, preach and teach. Truly Paul did so. *“Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers (huperetes) of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God”* (1 Cor 4:1).

Jesus said, *“If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour”* (John 12:26). We cannot be faithful servants of the Lord if we are not first the ministers of His Word. Many of Jesus’ disciples *“went back, and walked no more with him”* (John 6:66). Why? They failed to submit themselves to the authority of the Lord’s Word. They said, *“This is an hard saying; who can hear it?”* (John 6:60). What about you? Is it a hard saying for you when God commands you: *“Be ye separate... be not conformed to this world... be ye holy”* (2 Cor 6:17; Rom 12:2; 1 Pet 1:16), etc?

THOUGHT: I must submit to the authority of God’s Word.

PRAYER: Lord, help me submit to the authority of Thy Word.

BETTER TO KEEP GOD'S WORD (7)

When a person truly confesses Jesus as his Lord (Greek: *Kurios*), he must be His servant or bond-slave (Greek: *doulos*). He belongs to the Lord and submits to the authority of the Lord and His Word. Thus, a faithful servant (*doulos*) will be a faithful minister (*huperetes*) of God's Word. When Jesus appeared and revealed Himself to Saul (later called Paul), Saul submitted to the Lord unconditionally. He said, "*Lord* (*Kurios*), *what wilt thou have me to do?*" (Acts 9:6). Can you say to your Lord, "Lord, I wholeheartedly submit myself to Thee. It is no longer what I want or like to do, but only what Thou wantest me to do"? Paul was truly "*a servant* (*doulos*) *of Jesus Christ*" (Rom 1:1), and he was a faithful "*servant*" (*doulos*) because he was a faithful minister (*huperetes*) of God's Word, trying to please the Lord alone. "... *if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant* (*doulos*) *of Christ*" (Gal 1:10).

When the Lord gives His pounds to His servants (*doulos*), He commands them, "*Occupy till I come*" (Luke 19:12-13). "*Occupy*" in Greek (*pragmateuomai*) means to "be doing, to be busy, occupied, to do business, to trade or traffic" (Zodhiates). The Lord wants us to keep ourselves busy doing His will and His work with whatever He has given to us. Those servants who submit to the Lord and His Word and "*occupy*" till He comes will be blessed as good and faithful servants (*doulos*) (Luke 19:17). But the servants who do not submit to the authority of the Lord and His Word will be condemned. "*But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me*" (Luke 19:27). To the lazy and disobedient servant, Jesus said, "*Thou wicked and slothful servant* (*doulos*)... *And cast ye the unprofitable servant* (*doulos*) *into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth*" (Matt 25:26, 30). Thus, those who say to Jesus, "*Lord* (*Kurios*), *Lord* (*Kurios*)" but do not submit to God's will and Word, will surely be rejected by God (Matt 7:21; Luke 6:46).

THOUGHT: Am I a good and faithful bond-slave of Christ?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be Thy good and faithful bond-slave.

BETTER TO BE ZEALOUS (1)

To the church in Laodicea, the Lord Jesus Christ, the source of eternal life and all blessings, had to rebuke the Laodicean believers for their lukewarmness, pride, indifference and self-complacency. He mercifully stood outside waiting and knocking at the door of their hearts. They, however, thought they were rich and needed nothing, not even the Lord, His Word, His grace or His blessings! To the proud, lukewarm, self-complacent believers in Laodicea, Jesus Christ manifested Himself as, *"the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God"* (Rev 3:14).

Jesus is the Amen: The term "*Amen*" in Greek "transliterated from the Hebrew means firm, steady, trustworthy, faithful. '*The God of truth*' (Isa 65:16) in Hebrew is '*the God of Amen*.' In the Old Testament, it is used often at the end of a sentence to confirm the preceding words and invokes their fulfillment, '*so be it*' (Jer 11:5). In the New Testament (NT), it indicates affirmation, in truth, verily (Matt 5:18, 26; 6:2). It also means consent or desire, so be it, and as such it concludes prayers (Matt 6:13; Rom 15:33; 2 Cor 13:14). In the entire NT, only the Lord Jesus uses *amen* at the beginning of a sentence as a word of affirmation (John 1:51; 3:3, 5, 11; 5:19, at al), '*Verily, verily, I say unto you,*' or '*Amen, amen, I say unto you,*' which could be rendered, '*I who am the Amen [Truth itself] tell you as the most certain and infallible truth*'" (Zodhiates).

2 Corinthians 1:20 says, "*For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.*" This means God's promises are true, trustworthy and sure. The Lord says that He is "*the Amen*" to confirm that there is no doubt, lie, falsehood, or mistake at all with Him and His Word. As He Himself is Truth, His Word is true, sure, inerrant, and infallible!

THOUGHT: The Lord and His Word are absolutely trustworthy.

PRAYER: O Lord, may I always trust in Thee and Thy Word.

BETTER TO BE ZEALOUS (2)

Jesus is the faithful and true witness: A faithful and true witness will only say or tell exactly the truth of what he has seen, heard and known without any addition, subtraction, misrepresentation, or distortion. Thus, what the Lord says about the believers in Laodicea is absolutely true, and what He says about God and man and His salvation for man in the Holy Bible is perfectly true and trustworthy.

Jesus is the beginning of the creation of God: Jesus is the source of Life, the Creator, the Provider and the Sustainer of all things. Without Him, we do not have anything, not even our existence on earth. Truly, *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made”* (John 1:1, 3; cf. Col 1:16-17), and *“upholding all things by the word of his power”* (Heb 1:3). Thus, a *“man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven”* (John 3:27). The believers in Laodicea forgot this truth. They were proud, self-complacent and independent, thinking that they needed nothing, not even the Lord, His grace, His righteousness and blessings! They even forgot that through the great earthquake in AD 60, all their wealth and riches came to nothing in a matter of seconds! It is always wise for us to remember that all we have is from the Lord, and that we will always need the Lord and His Word, just like the branches need the support and the life from the vine! Because of His love, the Lord had to rebuke the believers in Laodicea. *“I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot”* (Rev 3:15).

“Cold” figuratively refers to refreshment: It is not vain to give Jesus’ disciples *“a cup of cold water”* to refresh their thirst (Matt 10:42). Spiritually, Paul was encouraged, comforted and refreshed by Philemon’s love (Philem 1:7). The believers in Laodicea did not “refresh” the Lord and other believers due to their lukewarmness!

THOUGHT: All I have is from the Lord, my Creator and Giver!

PRAYER: Lord, how I thank Thee for Thy grace and blessings.

BETTER TO BE ZEALOUS (3)

“Hot” figuratively refers to zeal and enthusiasm: We are commanded to be “*not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord*” (Rom 12:11). The Lord is not pleased with lukewarm believers who worship and serve Him without any zeal or fervency!

“Lukewarm”: In feasts in the ancient world, the people customarily drank what was either hot or cold — never lukewarm. Spiritually speaking, the believers in Laodicea did not see their indifference to the Lord, His Word and His kingdom. They still worshipped and served the Lord, but they did it without zeal, love or fervency. Their hearts were so indifferent to the Lord. The Lord Jesus could not stand their lukewarmness. He said, “*I will spue thee out of my mouth*” (Rev 3:16). The believers in Laodicea were rich materially but poor spiritually. They proudly said, “*I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked*” (Rev 3:17).

Spiritual lukewarmness is the condition of most “Christians” nowadays. They do not deny the Lord. They still worship God on Sundays. Having their riches and wealth, high education and knowledge, they are proud, indifferent, and self-complacent. They do not wholeheartedly seek the Lord and His guidance nor wait upon His will and timing. Personal devotion and quiet time with the Lord seems impractical in their busy lives. They are neither interested in studying God’s Word seriously nor concerned for God’s Word when it is attacked. They think they “*have need of nothing*” (Rev 3:17), not even the Lord’s presence, His righteousness or spiritual blessings. The Lord has to stand outside knocking on the door of their hearts! Sadly, they do not realise that they are spiritually blind and poor: they lack the Lord’s presence, the love and zeal for Him, faith and hope in Him, holiness, godliness, and righteousness from Him, and grace, peace and joy from Him!

THOUGHT: The zealous Lord does not want a lukewarm people.

PRAYER: Lord, keep me zealous and fervent for Thee always.

BETTER TO BE ZEALOUS (4)

The Lord counselled the lukewarm believers: *"I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see"* (Rev 3:18). They were to *"buy"* from Him alone His tried gold, white garment and spiritual eye ointment. They had to come to the Lord Himself and pay a price to get His true riches. That price is surely not their money (Acts 8:20) nor their own merits. It is their humility, repentance and zeal. *"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent"* (Rev 3:19). *"Be zealous"* here is in the present tense. It literally means to *"keep on being zealous."*

Jesus' tried gold is His truth, His Word, His promises, His grace, His presence, and His all, through His death and resurrection. *"Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding"* (Prov 23:23). *"Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold"* (Ps 119:127), and *"do count them but dung, that I may win Christ"* (Phil 3:8).

Jesus' white raiment is His perfect righteousness (Isa 61:10; cf. Phil 3:9), and His righteousness must be seen as the fruit in a Christian's life, *"the fine linen is the righteousness of saints"* (Rev 19:8).

The "eyesalve" is the spiritual enlightenment from the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:18). To be rich in Christ, we have to humble ourselves, repent, and come back to the Lord with zeal and fervency. We must open the door of our hearts to welcome the Lord Jesus Christ, His Word and the Holy Spirit with our faith and humble dependence and submission. Then we can enjoy a blessed fellowship with Him. *"I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me"* (Rev 3:20).

THOUGHT: Be zealous and repent! Be spiritually rich in the Lord!

PRAYER: O Lord, how I thank Thee for Thy loving chastisement!

REWARDS FOR THE OVERCOMERS (1)

The Lord Jesus Christ has His rewards for the overcomers, not for the quitters. *“He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son”* (Rev 21:7). The overcomers will inherit all things. All the rewards for the overcomers of the seven churches will be ours if we humbly repent of our sins and shortcomings, do the first works from God’s Word with love and zeal, hold fast God’s Word and observe it with a submissive heart, confess the Lord Jesus Christ’s name, keep ourselves holy and separate from sin, ungodliness, worldliness, immorality, idolatry, and wrong doctrines without compromise, keep ourselves alive in Christ, in the Holy Spirit, and God’s Word, and trust in the Lord to suffer all things and endure all things faithfully unto death.

1. *“To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God”* (Rev 2:7). After Adam and Eve failed to obey God, they were cursed and cast out of the garden of Eden. In the New Heaven and Earth, there is *“the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations... Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city”* (Rev 22:2, 14). Do you desire to partake of the tree of life? That blessing is only for the overcomers!

2. *“Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life... He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death”* (Rev 2:10-11). The second death is the eternal condemnation in the Lake of Fire for *“the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars”* (Rev 21:8; cf. 22:14-15). Do you want to escape the second death in the Lake of Fire? Do you want to receive a crown of life? That blessing is only for the overcomers!

THOUGHT: I must overcome to inherit all things from the Lord.

PRAYER: Lord, please help me overcome to inherit Thy blessings.

REWARDS FOR THE OVERCOMERS (2)

3. *“To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it” (Rev 2:17).*

(a) *“To eat of the hidden manna.”* The Lord Jesus is *“the bread of life.”* He says, *“he that eateth me, even he shall live by me”* (John 6:35, 57). *“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... I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you”* (John 14:21; 15:15). The overcomers will get *“to eat of the hidden manna.”* Surely, those who despise, question or criticise God’s Word can never receive His hidden manna. Do you want to eat the hidden manna? That blessing is only for the overcomers!

(b) To be given *“a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.”* This shows the blessed intimacy between the Lord and His obedient and faithful followers. The Greek word for *“stone”* or *“pebble”* is used twice in the New Testament. The Greeks had an ancient custom of *“acquitting with a white stone or pebble and condemning with a black one”* (Zodhiates). Before his conversion, Paul persecuted Christians, saying, *“I gave my voice against them”* (Acts 26:10). This literally means: *“I cast down my pebble”* (a black one) to condemn them.

The Lord Jesus promises to defend and justify those who faithfully keep His Word and overcome Satan, sin, idolatry, worldliness and heresy. They shall not be condemned with those who compromise and tolerate sins and heresies. Do you want to receive *“a white stone”*? That blessing is only for the overcomers!

THOUGHT: It is a great blessing to have the Lord and His defence.

PRAYER: Lord, please let me know Thee and Thy Word more.

REWARDS FOR THE OVERCOMERS (3)

4. *"And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron... And I will give him the morning star"* (Rev 2:26-28).

Only when we do the Lord's work according to His will and His way, will we receive His reward. Our labour will not be in vain. It must not be our works, nor man's, but the Lord's (1 Cor 15:58). The reward is:

(a) To reign with Christ: When Christ comes to establish His kingdom of peace on earth, *"if we suffer, we shall also reign with him"* (2 Tim 2:12; cf. Rev 20:6). When this world of darkness ends and Satan is chained, our Lord will start His glorious millennial kingdom of peace on earth. Are we looking forward to that glorious day? *"... Even so, come, Lord Jesus"* (Rev 22:20). Do you want to reign with Christ and have that blessed hope? That blessing is only for the overcomers!

(b) To receive the morning star: This is a reference to Lord Jesus, the Bright and Morning Star (Rev 22:16).

5. *"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).

To the believers in Sardis who rested in their empty *"name"* with slumbering spiritual life, the Lord reminds them of the far more important name that they should aim for: the name that is written in the book of life! Furthermore, it is a great honour to *"be clothed in white raiment"* (Rev 3:5) and *"walk with"* (Rev 3:4) the Lord of lords and King of kings in white. Do you want to walk with the Lord in white raiment with your name confessed before God the Father and His angels? That blessing is only for the overcomers!

THOUGHT: Christ will confess my name before God the Father!

PRAYER: Lord, how I thank Thee for Thy great blessings!

MONDAY, MARCH 21

REVELATION 3:12, 20-21

REVELATION 3:21

*"To him that overcometh
will I grant to sit
with me in my throne..."*

REWARDS FOR THE OVERCOMERS (4)

6. *"Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out..."* (Rev 3:12). The Church is the temple of God (1 Cor 3:16-17; 1 Tim 3:15). A *"pillar"* symbolizes importance, stability and permanence. James, Cephas (Peter) and John were *"pillars"* of the church (Gal 2:9). Those who overcome Satan and humbly submit to God and His Word with faith and love, God will make them *"pillars."* Furthermore, the Lord promises, *"I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name"* (Rev 3:12). This blessing is only for the overcomers!

7. *"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne"* (Rev 3:21). The Lord is willing to share His seat with the overcomers! Shall we not watchfully live for the Lord and His Word and overcome Satan and our self-complacency? May we say like Paul, *"but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus"* (Phil 3:13-14). Do you find it a great honour to sit with our Lord of lords in His throne? That blessing is only for the overcomers!

The Lord Jesus promises, *"He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son"* (Rev 21:7). The Lord's reward comes with great glory for the overcomers whose God is their Father and their Lord! Surely, *"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory... For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us"* and *"count all things but loss"* to *"win Christ"* and *"be found in him"* (2 Cor 4:17; Rom 8:18; Phil 3:8-9).

THOUGHT: It is a great blessing to sit with Christ on His Throne!

PRAYER: Lord, help me count all things but loss to win Thee alone.

TUESDAY, MARCH 22

1 SAMUEL 17:32-50

2 CORINTHIANS 2:14

*"Now thanks be unto God,
which always causeth us
to triumph in Christ..."*

BE THANKFUL FOR THE VICTORY IN CHRIST (1)

All the rewards are only for those who have overcome themselves, the world, Satan and all circumstances to keep and do God's will, Word, and work faithfully and fervently unto death. It should be noted that the enemies of our souls are not human beings or *"flesh and blood,"* but our own sinful self, worldliness and Satan with his demons and followers (Rom 8:7; James 4:4; 1 Pet 5:8; Eph 6:12). As Satan is real, sin, sinful human nature and worldly temptations are real. We must have real victory over them. But how can we have the victory? Surely, it is not by the efforts of the flesh. All human efforts will fail due to their rebellious, depraved, corrupt and sinful nature. Knowing this truth we must not be impressed by those who claim that they are saints through their efforts or religious practices in monasteries, convents, pagodas or temples. Truly, *"Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts"* (Zech 4:6).

We can have the true victory by God alone through and in the Lord Jesus Christ alone. Outside of Christ or without Christ, there is no true victory. Thus, we have to turn to the Lord, wait upon Him and trust in Him alone. Like David, we must say to the enemies of our souls: *"The LORD saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the LORD'S, and he will give you into our hands"* (1 Sam 17:47). Then we must give all thanks, praise and glory to God alone for the victory in Christ. *"Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ..."* (2 Cor 2:14). *"But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Cor 15:57). If we are living a defeated life, we cannot be joyful to give thanks, praise or glory to God! The victory in Christ alone reminds us of our constant dependence on Him and submission to Him and His Word as the branch to the Vine (John 15:5). Having Christ, we shall have the victory. Without Christ, we shall surely be defeated before the enemies of our souls.

THOUGHT: The victory is from God through and in Christ alone!

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for the victory through and in Thee.

BE THANKFUL FOR THE VICTORY IN CHRIST (2)

Our sinful self with self-will, self-love, self-image, self-importance, self-righteousness, self-glory, etc will hinder our obedience and submission to God, His will, His Word and His way. The conflicts between self-will and God’s will lead us to say: “I want to do this, I do not want to do that, I like to do it my way, I like her but not him, I do not want to forgive him, I do not want to say sorry to her, I want to shame him, I deserve this, I want this, I must have this, why does he not talk with me, why does she not respect me, I do not want anyone to touch my thing or to take my seat or my portion, and I and me and my...” All these are said without regard to God’s will, Word and way! A life lived with conflicts between self-will and God’s will is a miserable life. There is no peace until the believer comes to a full submission to God’s will. No more I, nor me, nor my, nor mine, but the Lord and the Lord’s alone.

We can overcome our sinful self and flesh through Jesus alone. “*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). Let us take up our cross, deny our “self” daily and let Jesus live and manifest His life in 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).

Satan is like “*a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour*” (1 Pet 5:8), while we are like defenceless sheep! Thank God that our Lord Jesus Christ has come to “*destroy the works of the devil*” (1 John 3:8), to deliver us from “*the power of Satan*” (Acts 26:18), and He will “*bruise Satan under your feet shortly*” (Rom 16:20). We have the victory over Satan “*because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world*” (1 John 4:4), because “*the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one*” (1 John 2:14), and because of “*the blood of the Lamb*” (Rev 12:11).

THOUGHT: Christ is able to deliver me from self and Satan.

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

THURSDAY, MARCH 24

ROMANS 8:31-39

ROMANS 8:37

*"Nay, in all these things
we are more than conquerors
through him that loved us."*

BE THANKFUL FOR THE VICTORY IN CHRIST (3)

We live in a sinful and cursed world. Jesus prays to His Father, *"I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil"* (John 17:15). Satan always makes use of the world with *"the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life"* (1 John 2:16) to attract and tempt many to worship him unawares, to gain the world with worldly values like fame, wealth and power (Matt 4:8-9); and to distract many from God's Word and God's Truth (Mark 4:19). Many used to serve the Lord faithfully, but in the end they gave up like Demas. *"For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world..."* (2 Tim 4:10). However, if we are born again and are humbly trusting in our Lord Jesus Christ always, we shall have the victory over the world as our Lord Jesus did. *"... be of good cheer; I have overcome the world"* (John 16:33). *"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). Let us regard all things but loss (Phil 3:8) and take up our cross to learn not only to die to self but also to the world. *"But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world"* (Gal 6:14).

Sometimes we feel that we want to give up our hope, our faith or our ministry because of our long and painful trials, difficulties, afflictions, illnesses, misjudgments, criticisms, oppositions, persecutions, etc. However, if the Lord Jesus is with us, in us, and for us, He is able to see us through all circumstances triumphantly. *"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us"* (Rom 8:35, 37). All thanks, praise and glory be to our Lord!

THOUGHT: I can be more than conquerors through Christ alone!

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for graciously giving me the victory.

FRIDAY, MARCH 25

PSALM 49

PSALM 49:7

"None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him."

BE THANKFUL FOR GOD'S REDEMPTION IN CHRIST (1)

God's Word confirms: *"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God"* (Rom 3:23). *"All"* here refers to all human beings through the ages without any exception. It includes you and me, all the Jews and Gentiles, the virgin Mary, all apostles, all popes, all bishops, all pastors, all monks and all highly respected religious leaders, and all kinds of people in this world. With the sinful nature, human beings cannot stop sinning in their heart, mind, words, and deeds every day, so they can never save themselves and expect others to save them. God's Word says, *"None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him: (For the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever)"* (Ps 49:7-8). The redemption of the human soul is so costly that no one can pay it off for ever, not by his efforts, good works or religious rituals or practices. Sadly, many have not seen this truth. They try to save themselves or turn to human beings (eg.: Mary or "saints" or religious leaders) for their salvation!

If we were in prison waiting to be executed for our sins and trespasses, you can neither save yourself nor expect me to save you as I am also a sinner and would be executed just like you. In our hopelessness and helplessness, if someone were sinless outside of the prison and willing to come in to die for us, we must be thankful to him and remember the day he died for us. Likewise, all mankind in this world are sinners waiting to be judged and executed by the holy and righteous God. However, there is Good News for mankind. Out of His great love, God sent His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (who is sinless, and is from Heaven, and not from this world) to enter into this world as a perfect God-Man to die for mankind, including you and me. He was crucified, died and buried on Good Friday, not because of His sins, but because of mankind's, including yours and mine. Are we thankful to Him?

THOUGHT: Without God's redemption in Christ, I shall perish.

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for Thy death and resurrection for me.

BE THANKFUL FOR GOD'S REDEMPTION IN CHRIST (2)

The verb "*redeem*" is translated from two Greek words. First, *agorazo* means "to redeem, to purchase, to buy." *"And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed (agorazo) us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation"* (Rev 5:9). From this verb, we have *exagorazo*, a strengthened form of *agorazo*, "to buy," denotes "to buy out" (*ex* for *ek*), especially of purchasing a slave with a view to his freedom. *"Christ hath redeemed (exagorazo) us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree"* (Gal 3:13). Second, *lutroo* means "to release on receipt of ransom" (akin to *lutron*, "a ransom"). It is used in the middle voice, signifying "to release by paying a ransom price, to redeem" (a) in the natural sense of delivering, Luke 24:21, of setting Israel free from the Roman yoke; (b) in a spiritual sense, Titus 2:14, of the work of Christ in "redeeming" men "from all iniquity" (*anomia*, "lawlessness," the bondage of self-will which rejects the will of God); 1 Peter 1:18 (passive voice), "ye were redeemed," from a vain manner of life, i.e. from bondage to tradition. In both instances the death of Christ is stated as the means of "redemption" (Vine's).

The price of redemption is so costly that no man can pay it for himself or others (Ps 49:7-8). That is why Jesus Christ had to humbly come into this world to die and shed His precious blood to set believers free from sin, from the curse of the law and from the condemnation of sin, that they can be God's children (Titus 2:14; Gal 3:13; 4:5; Rev 5:9). Being saved, we are still waiting for our full redemption. That is when the Lord Jesus comes to transform our vile body to be like His glorious body with the Holy Spirit as God's seal for our redemption (Phil 3:21; Eph 4:30). Being redeemed, *"ye are not your own... For ye are bought (agorazo) with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's"* (1 Cor 6:19-20).

THOUGHT: The Lord has bought me with His blood, so I am His.

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for redeeming me with Thy blood.

BE THANKFUL FOR THE RISEN JESUS CHRIST (1)

We must be thankful to God for His great love and to our Saviour Jesus Christ for His sufferings and His death for us, who only deserve to be condemned due to our sins, shortcomings, and transgression! We must be thankful to God for raising Jesus Christ from the dead, making Him *"both Lord and Christ"* (Acts 2:36). He exalted Him to be *"a Prince and a Saviour"* (Acts 5:31), and has even *"highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name"* (Phil 2:9). And *"this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. 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 7:24-25). Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the foundation of the Christian faith and salvation because *"if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain... ye are yet in your sins"* (1 Cor 15:14, 17). However, do we truly exalt the risen Jesus Christ to be our personal Lord, Saviour, King and High Priest?

Many believe that they are saved by Christ's death and resurrection. That is correct but that is not all. God's Word reminds us that we are saved not only by Jesus' death and resurrection, but also by His life, *"For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement"* (Rom 5:6-11).

THOUGHT: Without Christ's resurrection, I would still be in my sins.
PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for Thy resurrection for me.

BE THANKFUL FOR THE RISEN JESUS CHRIST (2)

The true human nature (as exposed by God’s Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit) is weak, ungodly, sinful, deceitful, rebellious, and wicked. In Romans 5:6-10, God’s Word confirms this truth. It should be noted that Paul used the plural pronoun “we” to include himself, you and me without any exception: *“we were yet without strength... the ungodly... we were yet sinners... we were enemies”* (Rom 5:6, 8, 10).

“Without strength” (Rom 5:6): i.e. weak, helpless, impotent, powerless. Due to human weaknesses, we have failed to love God, obey Him, glorify Him and serve Him with all our hearts, souls, minds, and strength. We also fail to overcome our sinful nature, selfishness, and temptations of the world and Satan.

“Ungodly” (Rom 5:6): i.e. without any fear of God, wicked. Due to our ungodliness, we do not fear God nor tremble at His Word. On the contrary, we arrogantly criticise and judge God’s Word and just do what pleases our own will and desires but not God’s.

“Sinners” (Rom 5:8): i.e. those who fail to do their duty toward God, transgress God’s law, and depart from God’s truth. *“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”* (Rom 3:23). No matter who we are and what we have done or achieved, we are all sinners before God and do need His mercy, grace and salvation.

“Enemies” (Rom 5:10): i.e. those who hate, reject, rebel against God and His truth. Due to our rebellious and sinful nature, we just love to live in sin against God’s Word and commandments. We *“loved darkness rather than light... hateth the light, neither cometh to the light”* (John 3:19-20). *“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). If Christ were not risen, we are yet in our sins!

THOUGHT: Without God’s salvation in Christ, I shall surely perish.

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for Thy death and resurrection for me.

BE THANKFUL FOR THE RISEN JESUS CHRIST (3)

With our totally depraved, corrupt, deceitful, rebellious and sinful nature, we will surely perish for ever. However, *"God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"* (Rom 5:8). The holy and righteous Creator died for His rebellious and offending creatures! *"Christ died for us"* only because of God's great love! The holy and righteous God cannot and will not ignore sins. Because of His righteousness and His great love for mankind, God had to deal with sins by putting all our sins upon His beloved Son. *"Christ died for the ungodly"* (Rom 5:6), *"while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"* (Rom 5:8). We must be thankful for God's gracious work of salvation in Christ because of the following:

We are justified by Jesus' blood (Rom 5:9): God declares that we are just and righteous in Christ, by God's grace alone. *"Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus"* (Rom 3:24). And by faith alone: *"being justified by faith"* (Rom 5:1).

We shall be saved from wrath through Jesus (Rom 5:9): It is unwise to reject God's love and salvation in Christ (John 3:36). We must thank God *"for God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Thess 5:9).

We are reconciled to God by the death of His Son (Rom 5:10): We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 5:1; cf. 2 Cor 5:18).

We shall be saved by Jesus' life (Rom 5:10): This is in the future tense meaning we shall need to be saved by Jesus' life moment by moment and day by day until He comes or until we are called home. *"... we also joy (glory) in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement (reconciliation)"* (Rom 5:11).

THOUGHT: I can enjoy God's love and salvation in Christ alone.

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for Thy many blessings.

BE THANKFUL FOR THE RISEN JESUS CHRIST (4)

What does it mean to be saved by Christ's life?

Jesus Christ Himself is our divine life: Jesus says, *"I am the resurrection, and the life... I am the way, the truth, and the life"* (John 11:25; 14:6). We must be thankful to God for giving us His Son, who is our divine life. *"For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory"* (Col 3:3-4). Our new life is the risen Lord Jesus Himself, a living Divine Person! If we have the Holy Bible but are without the risen Christ, we have no life.

Without Jesus Christ, we have no divine life: Without life from Christ, we have no divine power or strength to do God's Word, to live a victorious Christian life, and to serve Him fruitfully: *"for without me ye can do nothing"* (John 15:5).

We have to live by Christ: Like the branches living by the vine, we have to live by Christ by depending on Him, trusting in Him and submitting to Him and His Word moment by moment (John 15:1-8; 2 Pet 1:4). The Lord does not give His life to us like a separate and independent rechargeable battery, which we can use to contact Him sometimes for a spiritual charge. He gives His life to us like the source of power and we need to keep connected with Him all the time. When a light or a bulb keeps in contact with the power all the time, it keeps on shining. Once it is disconnected from the power, it stops shining. Truly, those who do not abide in Christ will not have an abundant and victorious Christian life. Are we truly and wisely in constant contact with Jesus Christ? Are we truly living by Christ? *"As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me"* (John 6:57).

THOUGHT: The Lord is my life, my strength, and my all.

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for being my life and my all.

BE THANKFUL TO GOD IN EVERYTHING

“O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever” (Ps 136:1). We ought to be thankful to God our Creator for His goodness, mercy, grace, love, salvation in Christ, good work in our heart and life, etc. God still commands us: *“Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Eph 5:20). *“In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you”* (1 Thess 5:18). How can we do that?

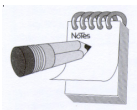
Be born again: Being God’s children, we can know who God is and what He has done for us in Christ, and we shall be thankful to Him. We shall be also thankful to God for all men (1 Tim 2:1), for our parents, spouses, children, siblings, relatives, pastors, elders, deacons, teachers, brethren in Christ, helpers, friends, etc. We must not be shy or hesitant to say “thank you” to them for their kindness and help.

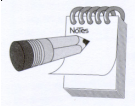
Humbly acknowledge our unworthiness: Truly knowing that we only deserve to be condemned, consumed or destroyed due to our sins, shortcomings and transgressions, we shall not murmur or complain against God. We will be thankful to Him for all things and in everything, either in prayer, personal devotion or family worship, in the church worship service, in preaching, in teaching, or in our conversation with others (Ps 100; Eph 5:4; Phil 4:6; etc).

Acknowledge God’s sovereignty: When accidents, illnesses, failures, loss of jobs or loved ones or material things, misjudgments, criticisms, troubles, afflictions, temptations, trials, oppositions, persecutions, etc come into our lives, it is vital to acknowledge that God is always almighty, loving, holy, sovereign and in control without making any mistake, and that He is able to make all things work together for good to His beloved and obedient children (Rom 8:28). Thus, we can give thanks to God for all things and in everything.

THOUGHT: God wants me to be thankful to Him in everything.

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for Thy love, goodness, and mercy.





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