

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

VOLUME 52

"Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me" (John 5:39).



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BEGINNING OF OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES

664 Lesson

MICAH INTRODUCES IDOLATRY IN ISRAEL

MEMORY VERSE: “And the man Micah had an house of gods, and made an ephod, and teraphim, and consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest” (Judges 17:5).

TEXT: Judges 17:1-13

Our text records the stealthy incursion of idolatry into the religious fabrics of God’s chosen people. Aided and persuaded by his mother, Micah started a household temple which was actually a shrine. In the course of the ill-advised enterprise, he arrogated to himself functions assigned only to the nation’s official high priest. Though his private temple was stocked with imitations of the emblems at the tabernacle in Shiloh, it was in competition with it. This importation of pagan practice into Israel was in direct violation of God’s revealed will. The effort was divisive, ignoble and condemnable (Exodus 20:22-24; Deuteronomy 4:15-19; 12:5-7,11,12).

Question 1: What challenge can we receive from Micah’s defection?

It is unfortunate that the tribe that produced a personality like Joshua was also at the forefront of leading the nation away from the God of their fathers. It is so worrisome that despite Joshua’s parting encouragement and warning in this regard, the infamous degeneracy is linked to his own tribesman. **“And there was a man of mount Ephraim, whose name was Micah...”** (Judges 17:1). Micah’s misadventure was in stark contrast to Joshua’s faith, faithfulness, discipline, devotion and godliness. The challenge here is that Christian believers, households and organisations should develop strategies to effectively transmit godly values so that succeeding generations can practice and preserve them (Ezra 7:25; Jeremiah 35:6-16; 2 Timothy 2:2; Titus 1:5,7,9).

CORRUPTION THROUGH EVIL INFLUENCE (Judges 17:1-6; Exodus 20:4; Leviticus 19:4; Deuteronomy 29:18-21)

The ugly development in this study was a result of the influence of gentile neighbours that Israel allowed to dwell within their borders. The vacillation of Israel in implementing God's decree to completely rout and supplant their gentile precursors in the land was already taking its toll. The result was their contamination and eventual condemnation. Christians should avoid fraternising with any agent of anti-scriptural practice (Deuteronomy 7:16-26; Proverbs 1:10; 4:14,15; Romans 16:17; Ephesians 5:11; 1Timothy 6:5; 2 John 10,11; Revelation 18:4). They should be quick to rebuke such as may be found among them, project Christ and preach His gospel of salvation to all they come in contact with.

The narrative opens with an incident of a theft in a family. One thousand one hundred shekels of silver was a large sum in the reckoning of the times; it could pay the Levite-turned-priest in the text for more than a hundred years. As there was neither hope nor clue of recovery of the money despite her appeals, mother decided to pour open imprecation on whoever was responsible. Upon this, Micah eventually owned up, and the owner declared that she had dedicated the money to God for graven and molten idols. **“And he said unto his mother, The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from thee, about which thou cursedst, and spakest of also in mine ears, behold, the silver is with me; I took it. And his mother said, Blessed be thou of the Lord, my son”** (Judges 17:2).

<p>Question 2: What can we deduce from Micah's reaction to his mother's declaration?</p>

Micah's restitution was not an outcome of genuine repentance, but an apparent apprehension of the consequences of the curse. Though the money he returned was happily received and the curse ostensibly reversed, his spiritual condition was nothing better. The likes of Micah should realize that whatever the disposition of an aggrieved person, God is consistently angry against evildoers (Psalm 7:11; 76:7). Unless there is genuine

repentance, the record of sin constantly reverberates, and the sinner remains repulsive in the sight of God.

Secondly, realizing the idolatrous implication of his mother's declaration of the purpose to which she had dedicated the money, he was reluctant to retain it. **"And when he had restored the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, his mother said, I had wholly dedicated the silver unto the LORD from my hand for my son, to make a graven image and a molten image: now therefore I will restore it unto thee. Yet he restored the money unto his mother..."** (Judges 17:3,4). The confusion in the woman's suggestion is so evident since images are completely forbidden in the worship of the true God (Deuteronomy 27:15). Unfortunately, Micah's initial scrupling soon gave way as he eventually gave in to his mother's corrupting influence, and became the manager of the evil project. **"And the man Micah had an house of gods, and made an ephod, and teraphim, and consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest"** (Judges 17:5).

Thirdly, Micah lacked close counsellors that could help him on matters of his faith: his closest confidant and counsellor appeared to be his backslidden mother. But being a father of grown up children, Micah was expected to resist the overt defection. His yielding to his mother's persuasion was proof of his shaky stand on matters of religion and true righteousness. Thereafter, he got his sons and others into worshipping at his "rebel chapel". How one confused person corrupts many others! (Ecclesiastes 9:18; 2 Timothy 4:3,4). Whether with little persuasion or much pressure, unstable souls get influenced by evil and corrupters and become agents of destabilization and devastation for many unsuspecting and careless souls. However, believers can be strong enough to withstand all the wiles of the enemy through the grace and power of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 16:13; Ephesians 6:10; 2 Timothy 2:1). Genuine conversion experience, personal conviction, committed leadership and effective fellowship with brethren of **"like precious"** faith could be of immense benefit in this regard (Proverbs 27:9; Hebrews 10:24).

The absence of a sovereign oversight aggravated Micah's pull to idolatry. **"In those days there was no king in Israel..."** (Judges 17:6). The Israelites in Micah's day generally lacked leadership check. The outcome of everyone doing **"that which was right in his own eyes"** was that crime and violence escalated and many ultimately ended up doing what was wrong in the sight of the Lord.

Question 3: What lessons can contemporary Christians learn from the societal permissiveness of Micah's time?

Believers should not be antagonistic to civil government no matter the perceived shortcoming of those vested with the duties of statecraft. Christians are called to be law-abiding and interceding (Jeremiah 29:7; 1 Timothy 2:1-3; 1 Peter 2:13-15). In contemporary Christian setting, the importance of ecclesiastical control cannot be over-emphasized: those in church leadership positions must perform their oversight functions with utmost diligence, while followers should be submissive and cooperative (Romans 12:8; Hebrews 13:17).

A CONSCRIPT'S ERROR AND ILLUSION (Judges 17:7-11; Numbers 16:8-10; 1 Kings 13:33,34; Ezekiel 13:19; 1 Timothy 6:10)

Generations of Levites were conscripts in God's spiritual army primarily to fight against the incursion of evil, to prevent defilement and to assist in the process of making atonement for sin. Their choice had been by divine fiat. They were born into peculiar assignments with special privileges. Their fulfilment in life lay in aligning with the demands of their calling as outlined by God. Unfortunately, there were some dissenters in the tribe: the Levite in today's study was one of such. It was obvious he was discontent with the divine arrangement. Living in a world of illusion, he supposed he could make it better outside the confines of God's allotment. He did not stay in any of the cities or villages appointed for Levites, but opted to sojourn in Bethlehem from where he came across Micah.

"And there was a young man out of Bethlehemjudah of the family of Judah, who was a Levite, and he

sojourned there” (Judges 17:7). His degenerate lifestyle negated God’s will for him, yet he did not bother to seek divine help.

Question 4: Why did Micah need the services of this wandering Levite?

It was easy to recognise the mockery in the whole setup as long as Micah’s son served as priest. Attendance and patronage at the temple being consequently lower than anticipated, the coming of the Levite presented a hope of providing some form of legitimacy for the shrine. The appointment of the Levite was based solely on his genealogical credential. In similar situations in contemporary times, it is usually skewed in favour of academic, charismatic or seminary qualifications. While these have their worth and usefulness, a Bible-believing church should always be guided by scriptural principles and place a higher premium on character (Exodus 18:21; Acts 6:3; 1 Timothy 3:7,8).

Question 5: Comment on what attracted the Levite to Micah.

The Levite, thought to be “**Jonathan, the son of Geershom**” (Judges 18:30), decided to pitch his tent with idolatrous Micah because the latter offered him promotion, payment and provision. These factors still delude some Christians and church workers from their calling in contemporary times. Unfortunately, Micah’s payment with all his provision of lodgement and vestments were not comparable to the benefits accruable from divine provision which the Levite snubbed. Believers should realize that the overall cost of decamping from Christ far outweighs the temporal benefits. Indeed, it is sheer folly to abandon ministerial calling for anything else (Jonah 2:8; Jeremiah 2:7,8; 10:8).

That the Israelites had reneged in remitting their due tithes for the maintenance of the Levites was quite condemnable. The resultant abandonment of assignments that were fundamental to the spiritual well-being of God’s people should warn Christians to regularly pay full tithes and offerings for the sustenance

of God's projects on earth. However, the failure of one person, group or category was no justification for the criminal misadventure of Jonathan: he could have taken up any other legitimate business to earn a decent living so as to remain relevant in the execution of his divinely assigned role among the people of God.

The Levite's acceptance of Micah's offer shows his shallowness, ignorance, low esteem and despicable non-compliance to God's word. His subsequent submission to Micah's consecration clearly indicates his gross illusion as to the essence of his levitical privileges. Instead of using the encounter with Micah to correct the growing error, he sacrificed his moral duty for his temporal needs, and became fully yoked in idolatry (2 Corinthians 6:14).

CONTEMPORARY EXAMPLES OF IDOLATRY
(Judges 17:12,13; Proverbs 30:12; Isaiah 44:20; Matthew 15:9; Romans 1:21-23)

Carvings and images of saints on church altars are reminiscences of Micah's errors. Their minds and conscience being defiled, the patrons and members of such assemblies become abominable though they profess to know God (Titus 1:16). However, idolatry in our age is not limited to the graven or molten images. It can secretly lurk in the minds of its captives through ungodly principles, inordinate pursuits, unbridled egotism, undue gratification and covetousness (Colossians 3:5,6). The elevation of pleasure beyond the rightful claims or demands of God upon one's life, excessive adulation of a hero or celebrated talent, submission of oneself to another person in hope of mundane advantage, are elements of modern idolatry.

“And Micah consecrated the Levite; and the young man became his priest, and was in the house of Micah. Then said Micah, Now know I that the LORD will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest”
(Judges 17:12,13). It is surprising that for an affront over which one should fear a just retribution of God's wrath, enemies of the cross can still hope for His blessings. The blessing in reference here is obviously in terms of economic advancement and other physical

parameters. All they care for is the accruals, “**whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame...**” (Philippians 3:19).

Question 6: What can we learn from God’s attitude to the incident in the study?

As the lesson comes to a close, we cannot fail to notice the Lord’s silence in the text. The absence of direct divine response or comment on the issue in the text is not a proof of indifference or tacit approval of disobedience or apostasy. Having revealed His will through every means possible, the Lord does allow humans the liberty to express their love by obedience without coercion or inducement.

However, wilful departure from divine will grieves the Holy Spirit, leaves the disobedient void of prophetic restraint, disposes the sinner to heart-hardness, leads to reprobation and the risk of sudden unmitigated judgment (Psalm 50:16-22; Ezekiel 3:26; Daniel 3:16-30; Hosea 4:17; Acts 7:42; Romans 1:21-23,28; Revelation 14:10). It is therefore, imperative for every contemporary believer to diligently study the Scriptures, be resolutely committed to keeping the terms of the divine covenant and avoid the error of the likes of Micah and his compromising Levite priest in this end time.

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING			EVENING	
MON	Acts	21	Songs	1-2
TUE	“	22	“	3-4
WED	“	23	“	5-6
THUR	“	24	“	7-8
FRI	“	25	Isaiah	1
SAT	“	26	“	2
SUN	“	27	“	3

665 Lesson

DAN SEEKS TERRITORIAL EXPANSION

MEMORY VERSE: “And the coast of the children of Dan went out too little for them: therefore the children of Dan went up to fight against Leshem, and took it, and smote it with the edge of the sword, and possessed it, and dwelt therein, and called Leshem, Dan, after the name of Dan their father” (Joshua 19:47).

TEXT: Judges 18:1-31

In the preceding chapter, Micah became idolatrous, introduced it in Benjamin and appointed a renegade Levite to be his priest. This was a typical manifestation of apostasy which characterized individuals and entire tribes in Israel at the time of the judges. In this study, the absence of leadership in Israel was again mentioned as a reason for the lawlessness in the land. In fact, the truth that **“there was no king in Israel”** featured four times in the book of Judges (Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). The consequence of this rudderless lifestyle was obvious: **“and so every man did what was right in his own eyes”**. The role of spiritual leadership cannot be downplayed by any generation of people who seek to please God. Besides, freedom without restraint and responsibility and loose living in disregard of God’s word lead to the abyss of moral corruption and destruction (Proverbs 14:12).

Dan, the last tribe to obtain their inheritance, found their lot too little for them because they were sandwiched between the two powerful tribes – Judah and Ephraim – and they were pushed from the southern coast by the Amorites (Judges 1:34). Consequently, the Danites could only move northward in search of a new territory to support their fast growing population. It was on this expedition for a new territory that their depravity manifested as they discovered Micah’s idols and his Levite-priest. They pillaged the idols, bribed the priest, hijacked him and thereafter destroyed the people of Laish who dwelt carelessly. Thus, the Danites became

the first tribe in Israel to formally embrace idolatry and it was not a surprise that Dan later became one of the two places chosen by King Jeroboam to place his idols (1 Kings 12:25-33). At the beginning of the chapter, idol worship was a family affair but has now become a tribal affair. Sin is cancerous; **“a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump”** (Galatians 5:9).

Question 1: What are the temptations associated with seeking greener pastures which believers need to watch?

THE SEARCH FOR NEW TERRITORY BY THE DANITES (Judges 18:1-10; Joshua 2:1,23,24; Numbers 13:1-3,17-20,30; Judges 17:7-12; 1 Kings 22:5; Deuteronomy 8:7-10; John 14:1-3; Revelation 22:3-5; 21:3,4; Psalms 34:9,10)

The increasing population of the children of Dan made their dwelling place too small for them. They were the second highest, next only to the tribe of Judah (Numbers 1 and 26). They sent five valiant men to search out the land just as Moses had sent twelve spies and Joshua, two. These spies were to go and furnish the entire army with necessary information needed to capture the land. This military strategy – reconnaissance – is absolutely necessary in spiritual warfare and work. Christian service, especially church planting, should be done with prayerful surveying and planning. There is need to assess the place of intent, the people, their custom, religion, etc. so as to make adequate preparations.

On their way to Laish (also called Leshem – Joshua 19:47), the Danite spies got to mount Ephraim and lodged in the house of Micah who had gone into idolatry. During that short stay, they yielded to the influence of Micah’s idolatry and this translated into setting up of those idols which were embraced by the whole tribe. Lodging in the house of Micah exposed the Danites to his collection of idols. Also, they saw the Levite-priest who, being an accomplice, was offering idolatrous services for pecuniary purposes.

While the spies dwelt in the house of Micah, they interacted with the Levite and discovered he was not

an Ephraimite. He volunteered some useful information about all the idols and groves that were in Micah's house, the status of the priest and his vulnerability. We must be careful how we give information to strangers in these days of global security challenge.

Then, the strangers gave the first hint of their own spiritual decline by asking the idol priest to ask counsel of God for them concerning their journey to Laish. The people left the true priests in Shiloh where they should have received sound divine guidance to ask counsel from an idolatrous priest. It is wrong to leave divinely appointed spiritual leaders and wander to prayer houses and commercial prophets who, though disguised as Christian ministers, are not different from soothsayers. Undue inquisitiveness and prying into the future can make a professing believer fall into the hands of false prophets in these last days. God prohibits the practice of divination or sorcery in whatever form (Deuteronomy 18:10-13; Ezekiel 21:21-24; Hosea 4:12; Jeremiah 23:21,22,32).

Question 2: What is the spiritual import of believers seeking new territory today?

The Levite conveyed an encouraging message to the Danites and his prediction came true. Fulfilment of his prediction did not convey any divine approval that he was a true priest. God can use anything to speak to people. He used an ass to speak to Balaam and a cock to blow the whistle for Peter when he denied Christ.

The spies eventually arrived Laish which is about 100 miles from Zorah. The commitment of these Danites is instructive to modern day preachers who cannot go the extra mile for the Kingdom's sake. Jesus travelled to several places on foot to preach the gospel. Paul, the apostle, crisscrossed many lands. These are examples that God expects believers to follow.

At Laish, the spies found that the inhabitants were disorganized, unguarded, far and quite isolated from other communities. They deduced that the people were prone to attack and plunder. It is not a mark of godliness to be isolated in the community where we live on the

excuse that we want to be separated from the world. Spiritual or moral separation, which the Bible enjoins, is quite different from isolation based on prejudice or fanaticism which limits our Christian witness and exposes us to danger.

The land of Laish was also described as being very good and without **“want of anything that is in the earth”**. This land, though good, cannot be compared with heaven where there will be no more sorrow, death, tears, crying or pain. The Danites desired a better land and believers must desire heaven where, in reality, there will be no want of any good thing.

The spies returned after their search with good and encouraging report to the Danites. Laish was described as being desirable and its conquest attainable. The report of these spies agree with that of Caleb and Joshua and the two spies sent by Joshua. It encouraged the people to take positive steps and move towards their desired goal. Christian reportage should encourage and motivate people for great exploits. Faith in God makes us see giants as prey.

THE SINFUL ACT OF THE DANITES (Judges 18:13-26,30,31; Exodus 20:15,17; Luke 3:14; Matthew 5:39-41; Romans 12:19)

The Danites chose six hundred armed men to go and attack Laish. They left Zorah for Laish, arrived at Mount Ephraim and came to the house of Micah. The spies who surveyed the land informed their fellow soldiers of the idolatrous items in Micah's house and encouraged them to forcefully take possession of them.

The Danites forcefully took the idols of Micah and persuaded his priest to follow them so he could have a larger ministry and reward. They did not regard God's command against stealing and idolatry; neither did they reciprocate Micah's hospitality to the spies. Though Micah was idolatrous, he deserved a better treatment from the Danites who had benefited from his kindness. They were simply ingrates.

When Micah noticed that his idols had been stolen, he went in company of his neighbours to challenge these

pilferers. By his action, he showed commitment to his idols and risked his life to confront them. Idolaters worship the god they can carry; believers worship God who carries them. But some believers' commitment to God is a far cry from those of idol worshippers (Isaiah 46:3-7). Believers need to place greater value on their spiritual heritage of salvation, sanctification, Holy Ghost baptism, Bible doctrines and be more diligent in keeping them than idol worshippers their gods. We should hold them carefully lest they slip from us.

Question 3: How should believers value spiritual things?

Micah, unable to rout the Danites, lost his idols and priest to them. The Levite was easily bought over by the Danites with the bait of popularity, gain and materialism. For the same reason, Satan still seek to lure believers from Christ, their righteous Master. Judas was contented with thirty pieces of silver to betray the Lord; Esau gave up his birthright when offered pottage; and Demas forsook Paul's companionship because of his love for mundane things of the world. Let us watch against the antics of the god of this world.

The Danites eventually set up the idols that they stole from Micah's house for worship. It is ridiculous that men sculpt their own gods, and the living worship dead images of their own making, gods that can neither defend itself nor its owners. By this action, the Danites became the first tribe to begin full-scale idolatry in Israel.

THE SUPPRESSION OF LAISH BY THE DANITES
(Judges 18:27-29; 1 John 2:15-17; Ephesians 6:11,12; Psalms 46:1-7,11; Isaiah 37:35; 38:6; Zechariah 12:8; Jeremiah 50:34)

Question 4: How can believers avoid similar pitfalls that made Laish easy prey?

The armed Danites came to Laish, smote the inhabitants with the edge of the sword, took over the city, renovated it and renamed it Dan, after their father. Lack of security consciousness as an isolated settlement made the defeat of Laish easy. We become easy preys for the enemy when we live solitary and secretive lives. Believers are warned

not to seek repose on earth being pilgrims as they are in the midst of foes that are ready to devour them. Satan, his demons, the world and the flesh watch for unguarded moment so they can strike. Therefore, we must watch, pray and network with other believers (1 Peter 5:8). We need to cherish the old-time practices of having prayer and evangelism partners and regular visitation. Christians should also put on the whole armour of God and use every means of grace to overcome in life's battle. However, we should remember that we are not defenceless. God is our Refuge and present help in time of trouble. He is ready to defend us against satanic attacks.

Care must be taken lest our quest for enlarged coast draw us into ungodly practices that displease God. While there is nothing wrong with a desire for enlargement and increase, we must never forget that **“better is a little with righteousness than great revenues without right; and better is little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble therewith”** (Proverbs 16:8; 15:16).

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING			EVENING	
MON	Acts	28	Isaiah	4-5
TUE	Romans	1	“	6
WED	“	2	“	7
THUR	“	3	“	8
FRI	“	4	“	9
SAT	“	5	“	10
SUN	“	6	“	11

666 Lesson

MORAL PERVERSION IN GIBEAH

MEMORY VERSE: “Now as they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of the city, certain sons of Belial, beset the house round about, and beat at the door, and spake to the master of the house, the old man, saying, Bring forth the man that came into thine house, that we may know him” (Judges 19:22).

TEXT: Judges 19:1-30

The account of the tragic and heinous wickedness perpetrated by “**certain sons of Belial**” in Gibeah in the text mirrors the extent of moral degeneracy in the town. Bereft of the Spirit of God and emboldened by the absence of governmental sanctions, there is hardly any depth of depravity sinners cannot descend. Gang-raping a woman to death in Gibeah was a result of the prevalence of violent crimes and absence of leadership to curtail people’s excesses in Israel (verse 1). A peaceful society is achieved when the character of individual citizens changes positively and the law is upheld and enforced by its leadership.

However, some citizens still break the law and damn the consequence even in societies where it is dreaded. This highlights the need for genuine transformation of heart and life, which can only happen through commitment of believers to preaching the soul-saving gospel (James 5:20). The Scripture also enjoins believers to contribute to orderliness in the society by “**submitting to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors...**” (1 Peter 2:13,14).

Question 1: Why should believers promote orderliness in the society and how can this be done?

THE DANGERS OF PARENTAL INDULGENCE AND IMPIETY (Judges 19:2; Proverbs 22:6; Ezekiel 16:44,45; Corinthians 3:3; Luke 6:42)

At the root of the horrifying events in our study is the singular act of rebellion of the concubine against her husband and disobedience to the word of God. Concubines are second-rate wives permitted among the Jews in the Old Testament (Genesis 25:5,6; 22:24). In this particular case, parental indulgence seemed to have encouraged this woman in evil. **“And his concubine played the whore against him, and went away from him unto her father’s house... and was there four whole months”** (verse 2). The seed of whoredom may have been sown in her infant heart in a family where the word of God was not revered, where parents tolerated or tepidly rebuked obscenity of language or behaviour, pornography or indecent dressing; or where the parents themselves indulged in such vices. It is sad that her acts of whoredom did not meet with any action expressive of resentment or rebuke from her father. No doubt, the knowledge that her father would condone her immorality and receive her into his home after such abominable acts must have encouraged her sinful life. Parents, in most cases, cannot be exonerated from the vices in their children’s character.

Question 2: Explain the importance of bringing up our children in a godly way.

Since one cannot impart what one does not have, it is necessary for parents to be born again, and so be enabled to live upright lives before their children.

THE BLESSING OF FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION (Judges 19:3-9; Matthew 18:21,22; Romans 5:8; 12:17,18; Mark 11:25; Acts 24:16; Ezekiel 16:49)

There are some commendable character traits in the life of the Levite. **“And her husband arose and went after her, to speak friendly unto her and to bring her again...”**. In Israel under the Mosaic dispensation, such a grave infraction was visited with capital punishment. Though the concubine deserved condemnation, her injured husband, the Levite, set out on long hazardous journey for the purpose of reconciling with her. Though he was not in any way responsible for her action, he did not wait for some expression of contrition and apology

before considering any form of reprieve for her. He forgave her even before she thought of reconciliation. Forgiveness of personal wrongs and reconciliation are accorded great prominence in the gospel of Christ. To Peter's question: **"Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?"**, the Lord answered, **"I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven"**. The word of God precludes us from retaliation in matters of personal wrongs, and commands us to forgive those who offend us. **"Recompense to no man evil for evil"**, and **"if it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men"** (Romans 12:17,18). Obedience to these Scriptures leads us to forgiveness and reconciliation with those who wrong us. The blessings of obedience to these precepts for both the offended and the offender include peace of mind, better health, greater security and possibility of a lasting friendship in place of anger, suspicion, rancor and strife.

Question 3: What are the benefits of forgiveness and reconciliation?

Retaining offences in our hearts hinders us from receiving forgiveness from God and answers to our prayers. Our Lord Jesus Christ said, **"And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses"** (Mark 11:25).

However, we notice the absence of vital imperatives in the entire process of reconciliation between the Levite and his concubine. At no point did the father-in-law or the Levite remonstrate against the woman's sin. She herself did not in any way express any regret or repentance to God or to her husband. Contrition and repentance form the cornerstone of an enduring and sustained reconciliation. They lead us first to God against whose commandment we contravened. He alone has the power of ultimate forgiveness, and gives the grace and power to keep us from future offences. They also lead us to make appropriate restitution to our fellow men who have suffered from our misdeeds.

Question 4: What is restitution and what is its importance in preventing offences and fostering a lasting reconciliation?

THE DESPICABLE PERVERSION OF THE GIBEANITES (Judges 19:10-30; Proverbs 21:31; Psalm 3:5; 4:8; Acts 27:10-14; 1 Peter 4:9; Romans 1:21-24)

The Levite's willingness to overcome evil with good elicited a warm reception from his father-in-law and his daughter. The father-in-law, basking in the joy of a fresh reconciliation constrained the Levite to extend his stay beyond the third to the fifth day. The Levite and his company eventually departed and **"came over against Jebus, which is Jerusalem..."**. By the time they arrived Jebus, the sun was about to set. His servant therefore suggested that they pass the night in the city of the Jebusites. The Levite preferred to reach a city of Israel (Gibeah) rather than turn aside into **"a city of strangers"**. He assumed (and reasonably too) that greater safety awaited them in a city of Israel than elsewhere. Their unexpected experience teaches that safety is of the Lord even in a most secured place because the devil and evil men lurk everywhere (Proverbs 21:31).

While not totally discarding our human carefulness, effort and informed judgment, we must never rely on these only. We must **"trust in the Lord with all [our] heart; and lean not unto [our] own understanding"** (Proverbs 3:5). The most knowledgeable of men still needs divine guidance in those matters which, in human judgment, are of seeming certainty. By relying on their knowledge and experience, the ship owner and his crew barely escaped death when they ignored Apostle Paul's Spirit-inspired counsel that their voyage to Rome would be with hurt and much damage (Acts 27:10,11).

Question 5: Why do we still need to pray even in matters whose outcome or forecast seems certain?

The warm reception given to the Levite and his company by the old man is worth mentioning. Such hospitality is commanded by the word of God. We are enjoined to **"use hospitality one to another without grudging"** (1 Peter 4:9) and not be **"forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares"** (Hebrews 13:2).

“Now as they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of city, certain sons of Belial, beset the house round about, and beat at the door... saying, Bring forth the man that came into thine house, that we may know him.” These words are reminiscent of the encounter between Lot, the angels and the homosexuals of Sodom (Genesis 19:4-11). It is almost inconceivable that a group of men so vile, profane and perverted could be found in Israel. It shows that sin and wickedness know no national or racial boundary. It is only Christ that makes the difference.

Question 6: What spiritual condition lies at the root of homosexuality, lesbianism and such lewd perversions? What is the way out?

“Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened... 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” (Romans 1:21-24).

Men's mind and personality are affected when they abandon God. The word of God makes it clear that homosexuality and lesbianism are abominations (Leviticus 18:22), and self-defilement (1 Timothy 1:10). Those who practice them are excluded from the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9,10). Any individual, society or government that indulges or gives approval to these abominable practices will court God's wrath. However, if they return to God in repentance through Christ, they will be healed and restored (Hosea 6:1).

Blinded by their perverted passion, the **“men of Belial”** were deaf to all the entreaty of the old man to spare his guest. **“And the man, the master of the house, went out unto them, and said unto them, Nay, my brethren, nay, I pray you, do not so wickedly; seeing that this man is come into mine house, do not this**

folly.” In his importunity, he went to the extent of offering both his daughter and the Levites’ concubine to the perverted men. This offer is condemnable as it amounts to appeasing a sinner with another sin, **“or doing evil that good may come”**.

Being adamant, the Levite released his concubine whom the evil men of Gibeah abused all night. At dawn, she returned to the place her husband slept but collapsed at the doorstep and died. The grief-stricken and perplexed Levite devised a horrifying way of making public his experience in the hands of the men of Gibeah in order to demand for justice. He took the body of his concubine home, cut it into twelve pieces according to the number of the tribes of Israel, and sent to each tribe, a piece of her defiled flesh. In times of danger or poverty, believers must avoid taking any rash decision that can adversely affect other family members. We must maintain Christ-like selflessness and avoid any sinful trade-off while seeking security and wealth.

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING			EVENING	
MON	Romans	7	Isaiah	12-13
TUE	“	8	“	14
WED	“	9	“	15-16
THUR	“	10	“	17-18
FRI	“	11	“	19
SAT	“	12	“	20-21
SUN	“	13	“	22

667 Lesson

ISRAEL DEMANDS JUSTICE FROM GIBEAH

MEMORY VERSE: “Now therefore deliver us the men, the children of Belial, which are in Gibeah, that we may put them to death, and put away evil from Israel. But the children of Benjamin would not hearken to the voice of their brethren the children of Israel” (Judges 20:13).

TEXT: Judges 20:1-17

The previous chapter narrated the gory details of how some men of Gibeah did evil by raping a woman to death. A Levite whose estranged concubine was reunited with him was travelling with her from Bethlehem-judah to mount Ephraim. On their journey, the couple had to pass through the territory of Benjamin and they chose to lodge in Gibeah, among their fellow Israelites rather than in Jerusalem which was then occupied mainly by strangers. But in Gibeah, some men attempted to commit sodomy with the Levite and possibly harm him and his host. To save his head, the Levite gave them his concubine and the men raped her all night which led to her death. In the morning, the Levite found her lying dead at the door and took her, cut the corpse into twelve pieces and sent a piece to each of the twelve tribes of Israel.

The Israelites had drifted away from God and abandoned His laws. This led to unimaginable abominations and evil committed by individuals and whole communities in the nation. For instance, Micah, a man from mount Ephraim, and the whole tribe of Dan went into abominable idolatry by setting up images and worshipping them. Even the Levites who were specially chosen by God to serve Him and lead the people in true worship became lawless and self-serving. They were not left out of the national corruption as some of them, despite the fact that they were given cities to live in, wandered about seeking greener pastures and ready to offer idolatrous services because of ungodly gain (Judges 17:7-13). So,

the case of homosexuality and murder in Gibeah was just another sore point in the gross apostasy of Israel. It showed that some of the people had sunk into the depth of depravity for which Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed (Genesis 19:4- 13).

When the Israelites received the news of what happened in Gibeah of Benjamin and saw the chunk of the victim's flesh, they were aroused and decided to enforce justice against the perpetrators. They gathered to defend the law of God and stem the tide of evil in the nation. Though it was commendable that they demanded justice against the evildoers in Gibeah, what about the destructive influence of other sins in the larger society? The negative response of the Benjamites and the civil war that followed are the inevitable harvest the nation reaped because they departed from God and His law. The lesson here is that when an individual, family or nation abandons God, the inevitable result is a harvest of confusion, sorrow, pain and destruction.

Question 1: What was the consequence of Israel's drift from God at this time?

THE DEED OF WICKEDNESS REHEARSED (Judges 20:1-7; Joshua 22:11-34; 1 Thessalonians 5:21; 1 Timothy 5:21; Deuteronomy 1:16,17; Proverbs 18:5; Romans 2:1-3,21-23)

“Then all the children of Israel went out, and the congregation was gathered together as one man, from Dan even to Beersheba, with the land of Gilead, unto the LORD in Mizpeh” (Judges 20:1). When the Israelites received news of what happened in Gibeah, they gathered the men of war, twenty years and above, from the entire nation except the tribe of Benjamin. The expression, **“from Dan even to Beersheba”** signified the entire country. Dan was located in the northernmost part while Beersheba was in the south of the country.

Question 2: Why did Israel send messengers to the tribe of Benjamin and what does this teach us in the administration of justice?

The tribe of Benjamin to which Gibeah belonged, did not respond to the summon and were not present at Mizpeh; so, Israel had to send men to them asking that the culprits be released to face justice (Judges 20:3,12,13). The steps taken by the Israelites to address the crime committed by the men of Gibeah are commendable. They were prompt and unanimous in their response; four hundred thousand men gathered and were united, **“knit as one man”**. They decided to follow due process in dealing with the issue, notwithstanding the charged atmosphere.

First, they asked the Levite whose concubine was raped and murdered to rehearse his own side of the story before the entire congregation. He explained what happened, though he left off the fact that he selfishly traded his concubine for his own safety. After listening to the Levite, Israel sent to the tribe of Benjamin asking, **“what wickedness is this that is done among you?”** (Judges 20:12). That was an opportunity to hear the other side of the story, but the Benjamites were uncooperative.

There had been a similar case in Israel when majority of the tribes mobilised against the eastern tribes of Reuben, Gad and half tribe of Manasseh on account of the altar they built on the other side of Jordan shortly after they occupied Canaan. The eastern tribes explained their motive and defended themselves against the allegations of setting up a rival worship; and with that there was peace and unity (Joshua 22:11-34). One would have expected the Benjamites to also exonerate themselves or bring their strong reasons why the culprits should not face execution as demanded by Israel. Instead, they became hostile and prepared for war.

<p>Question 3: What steps must we take when cases of improper conduct are reported in the church?</p>
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The action of Israel in our text underscores the importance of fairness in matters of improper conduct. We must act promptly and follow due process to ensure that justice is administered in the church or elsewhere. There should be thorough and unbiased investigation to ascertain the truth (Deuteronomy 19:18). The

Scripture enjoins us to, **“Prove all things; hold fast that which is good”**; do **“nothing by partiality”**; **“do no unrighteousness in judgment”**; **“judge righteously between every man and his brother”**; not **“overthrow the righteous in judgment”** (1 Thessalonians 5:21; 1Timothy 5:21; Leviticus 19:15; Deuteronomy 1:16; Proverbs 18:5). In order to ensure fairness in judgment, we must listen to all the parties involved. While listening, we must depend on the Holy Spirit to guide us and reveal the truth or otherwise in the matter. The guilty person should be punished and the innocent cleared. No one should allow tribal, family or friendship ties to becloud their sense of judgment.

Sin must be dealt with in a holistic way in order not to lose the battle against widespread evil in the church. Leaders must ensure that as they attempt to bring other people to justice, they should be equally free from sin and corruption. The children of Israel were appalled at the terrible crime of the men of Gibeah, but they did nothing about the idolatry in the tribe of Dan. This challenges us to examine ourselves and first deal ruthlessly with sin in our own lives before we attempt to deal with it in the lives of others. There is no reward for people who engage in service without purity.

DETERMINATION TO AVENGE THE WICKED ACT
(Judges 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 13:12-16; 22:22; Leviticus 18:22-30; 20:10,13; Jude 3; Philippians 1:27)

The children of Israel sent messengers to the Benjamites to demand that they give up the rapists and murderers among them for justice. This was a fair and just demand based on scriptural principles (Deuteronomy 13:12-16; Leviticus 18:22-30; 20:10,13). By this demand, the Benjamites were given the opportunity to absolve themselves of complicity in the crime and to prove that they were not in support of the wickedness. On their part, the Israelites proved that they wanted peaceful solution and not war. They did not expect that the matter would become a prolonged conflict (Judges 20:10). All they wanted was that the culprits be brought to book and evil purged from the land. Unfortunately, the matter degenerated into an all-out war and loss of several lives.

Question 4: What can we learn from the zeal of the Israelites against the wickedness of the men of Gibeah?

The children of Israel manifested great zeal and commitment to deal with the sinners in Gibeah. They were determined to see that justice was meted to the culprits. The Israelites were united in the battle against lewdness in the land, even to the point of risking their lives. Believers should spare no effort in dealing with sin in their own lives and in the church. They are to earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. Like the Israelites, they are to unite in spiritual warfare against the kingdom of darkness and be ready to make necessary sacrifices to ensure that evil does not thrive in the church of the living God. Anything that can pollute the legacy of sound doctrine of God's word must be resisted.

The reason Israel adduced for insisting on justice against Gibeah was to **"put away evil from Israel"**. It was not a revenge mission or personal matter but a desire to purge the land and avert divine punishment against the nation. Christ's servants must also have right motives as they deal with sin in the church. We must ensure our eyes are set on God's glory and not in pursuit of any private agenda or personal advantage.

THE DEFENCE OF CRIMINALS BY THE BENJAMITES
(Judges 20:12-17; Exodus 23:2,7; Jeremiah 23:14; Ezekiel 13:22)

Though the men of Benjamin heard of the evil their tribal men committed against the Levite, they did not attempt to punish the offenders; rather, they rallied their entire tribe to fight against those demanding for justice. They turned down the call for justice and decided to mobilise for war in defence of evil. **"But the children of Benjamin gathered themselves together out of the cities unto Gibeah, to go out to battle against the children of Israel"** (Judges 20:14). By this action, the Benjamites strengthened the hand of Gibeah in wickedness.

Question 5: Point out some wrong attitudes manifested by the Benjamites.

The reaction of the Benjamites to Israel's demand for justice leaves little to be desired. It proved that they allowed tribal sentiments to becloud their sense of justice. Second, it showed that they valued tribal reputation than obeying the law of God. Third, they were biased and unprepared to hear from the man whose concubine was violated and killed. Fourth, by taking a stand against the other tribes in an unrighteous cause, they proved that they were thoroughly backslidden and steeped in arrogance. Of a truth, **“the backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways; but the LORD weigheth the spirits”** (Proverbs 14:14; 16:2; 21:2).

Whichever way it is considered, the Benjamites carried their tribal sentiment too far by mobilising 26,700 people to confront Israel's 400,000 soldiers. They may have unwittingly felt that they had God on their side while thinking that the Israelites were idolaters. Also, they were probably relying on their 700 sharp slingers and the fact that they were more familiar with the hilly terrain around Gibeah. In the end, they paid dearly for their misjudgment. Surely, **“Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall”. “When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom”** (Proverbs 16:18; 11:2).

<p>Question 6: What can we learn from the response of the Benjamites to Israel's demand for justice against Gibeah?</p>
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The conduct of the Benjamites in this case is an example of the growing tendency to tolerate and even defend sin in some Christian assemblies. Both members and leaders, though aware of ongoing sinful practices in their church, refuse to confront them. When we fail to discipline erring members or speak out against evil practices in our assemblies, we encourage evil and the end result can be disastrous, not only for the culprits but for the entire congregation. The Bible enjoins us to rebuke those who sin so that others, who may be in similar sins or intending to do so, may fear (1 Timothy 5:20). **“A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump”** (Galatians 5:9).

From the Benjamites, we learn that we must not defend sin or sinners; rather, we should expose and lead them

in the path of repentance and total recovery. Two, we must avoid tribalism. Three, we should not be wise in our own eyes, but be ready to always listen to the voice of reason and examine our stand vis-a-vis the word of God. Four, when we are rebuked or challenged over a wrong deed, we should humble ourselves and repent in order to avoid destruction (Proverbs 29:1).

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING			EVENING	
MON	Romans	14	Isaiah	23-24
TUE	"	15	"	25-26
WED	"	16	"	27-28
THUR	1 Corinthians	1	"	29
FRI	"	2	"	30
SAT	"	3	"	31-32
SUN	"	4	"	33-34

668 Lesson

CONFLICT BETWEEN ISRAEL AND BENJAMIN

MEMORY VERSE: “And the men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin; and the men of Israel put themselves in array to fight against them at Gibeah” (Judges 20:20).

TEXT: Judges 20:18-48

Prior to this study which focuses on the bloody civil war between the tribe of Benjamin and remaining tribes of Israel, some men of Gibeah had gang-raped a woman to death. This was a proof of the increasing lawlessness and corruption in Israel at the time they lacked judicial oversight and everyone did what was right in their eyes (Judges 19:1-30). Subsequent events led to a civil war.

The way the battle was fought, lost and won presents unforgettable and solemn lessons for present-day pilgrims on the need to fear God. Though the men of Israel were upbeat about bringing the rapists in Gibeah to book, they were blind to the gross idolatry and perversion of true worship among them. The tribe of Dan which was one of the tribes mobilized against the Benjamites was already involved in full scale idolatry, and the same law of God which condemned the rapists stipulated execution of idolaters (Judges 18:29-31; Deuteronomy 13:12-17; 17:2-9). As a result of their failure to deal with sin in their own lives while attempting to punish the sin of others, the Israelites were defeated twice.

Sin attracts God’s judgment. The judgment may be deferred but it will eventually come in God’s own way which is quite different from that of man. We must not also forget the saying that, “he who comes to equity must come with clean hands”. Both sides suffered heavy causalities because they were unable to resolve their conflict amicably. War can never be a viable alternative to peaceful conflict resolution, either in the church or

society. As God's ambassadors of peace, believers do not promote conflict.

Question 1: From the account in our text, why is it important for believers to avoid beating the drum of war whenever there is a conflict?

DANGER OF PRESUMPTION AND OVER CONFIDENCE IN BATTLE (Judges 20:18-25,8-11;Ezekiel 14:1-5; Proverbs 3:5-8; Numbers 27:21; Psalm 19:12,13; 33:16; 1 Kings 20:10-30)

Israel responded to the defiant attitude of the children of Benjamin by mobilizing 400,000 soldiers against them. They presumed that they would win as they go to fight their brethren, the Benjamites. Before going to battle, the counsel they asked from God was: **“which of us shall go up to the battle against the children of Benjamin? And the LORD said, Judah shall go up first”** (Judges 20:18). The prayer of Israel at this time was not whether they should go to battle or not; they had already decided they would (Judges 20:8-11).

Question 2: Why were the Israelites confident of victory over the children of Benjamin?

Rather than wait on God to know whether they should fight against the Benjamites or not (Numbers 27:21), they were presumptuous and overconfident. They must have concluded that they were fighting God's cause, trying to defend the law of God against sexual immorality; and their 400,000 men force would naturally overrun the paltry 26,000 soldiers of Benjamin. Israel also presumed on God's backing in the war and they felt all He needed do was to join them midstream and give them direction.

God answered the Israelites according to the folly of their prayer. Despite their seeking counsel from God, they were defeated and 22,000 lost their lives. Even after this defeat, they **“set the battle again in array in the place where they put themselves in array the first day”** and went before the Lord weeping and seeking counsel. The question they asked was, **“shall I go up again to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother?”**

(Judges 20:23). If they were not presumptuous, this prayer should have come before setting the battle in array. Again, they were confident of victory not because they relied on God's promise but trusted in the size of their army. They neither saw the need to look inwards and examine themselves nor think it appropriate to make necessary sacrifices unto God. Consequently, they were defeated again and another 18,000 men were lost.

We cannot use God for our own ends, and it is only when we put Him first in all our endeavours that we can experience His faithfulness. If the Israelites had been more concerned about the defence of God's honour and jealous for His name, that would have led them to a deeper repentance. Most likely, their soul-searching would have also pointed out the idolatry of the tribe of Dan and the general laxness in the entire nation. The mobilization of Israel against Benjamin, as it were, was mainly provoked by their emotional response to the pieces of the victim's body that was sent to their tribes.

Question 3: What can we learn from the defeat of Israel despite that fact that they had a just cause?

We need to avoid presumption and overconfidence in our walk with God. We should not lean on our own understanding but trust the Lord for counsel and guidance. Second, there are times when sheer large numbers are of no advantage. Though Israel had a large army and their opponent could be rightly described as **"little Benjamin"** (Psalm 68:27), they were defeated. They forgot that **"there is no king saved by the multitude of an host: a mighty man is not delivered by much strength"** (Psalm 33:16). Third, there are occasions where God's affirmation is not a guarantee for success. Though God answered the prayer of Israel as to which tribe should lead in the battle against Benjamin, that did not prevent their defeat.

There is a great difference between mere divine acquiescence and God's perfect will. Consider God's perspective and summary of Saul's coronation (1 Samuel 8-10). Hosea captured His commentary this way: **"O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in**

me is thine help. I will be thy king: where is any other that may save thee in all thy cities? and thy judges of whom thou saidst, Give me a king and princes? I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath” (Hosea 13:9-11). In spite of the clear involvement of God in the affair of choosing Saul as king, it was all a matter of His permissive will and it ended in disaster. The same was true of Israel in their first two encounters against Benjamin. We should avoid running our lives, family, church or ministry on the steam of God’s permissive will because that will not turn out to our profit in the end.

DIVINE FAVOUR THROUGH GENUINE REPENTANCE AND HUMILITY (Judges 20:26-28; James 4:8-10; Isaiah 55:6-9; 30:26; 57:15-18; Jonah 2:7-10; 2 Chronicles 7:14; Leviticus 26:40-42)

After suffering two successive defeats and loss of 40,000 soldiers in battle, the Israelites saw the need to humble themselves before God and ask for His mercy.

Question 4: How did Israel prove that they were truly repentant and ready to depend on God in their campaign against Benjamin?

Israel did not set the battle in array against Benjamin neither did they presume or trust in their military advantage any longer. They came before God, wept, fasted and offered necessary sacrifices in acknowledgment of their own need for God’s mercy before confronting their brother’s shortcomings (Judges 20:26; Matthew 7:1-5). Their prayer on this occasion reflected a subdued spirit and readiness to remove the log in their own eyes so they could see clearly to remove the speck from their brother’s eye. They asked God, **“Shall I yet again go up to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother, or shall I cease?”** and God’s answer was also complete: **“Go up; for tomorrow I will deliver them into thine hand”** (Judges 20:28). God gave them both direction and assurance of victory.

Genuine repentance of Israel attracted divine favour. They were ready to give up their attack against Benjamin, if God would so direct; after all, it is His word they endeavoured to defend. By this attitude, the Israelites

proved that they were no longer pursuing mere self-motivated mission; neither were they manifesting a 'holier-than-thou attitude'.

But Israel delayed their repentance until they had suffered heavy casualties before considering their ways. Men often wait until they get into desperate situations before they humble themselves before God, but it need not be so with us, as believers. We must not wait until we experience some tragedies in life before we turn to God to get rid of self-will. The scriptures enjoin us to **"Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up"** (James 4:8-10).

It should be noted also that God is ever merciful and faithful to forgive His penitent people. When Israel humbled themselves before the Lord, He also gave them His favour and granted them victory in battle.

DEFEAT OF BENJAMIN AND VINDICATION OF ISRAEL'S CAUSE (Judges 20:29-48; Joshua 8:1-26; Proverbs 11:21; 16:5; Ecclesiastes 8:11-14; Job 20:5; Psalm 37:35-37)

The children of Israel did not allow the previous defeats to hinder them from making a third attempt, especially after God had given them assurance of victory. Believers must not allow past failures to hinder them from making fresh attempts; they should learn from their mistakes and reposition themselves for progress.

The Israelites recovered themselves from the presumption of facing the Benjamites head on and they devised appropriate strategy in battle. They employed the same strategy that Joshua used in defeating Ai (Joshua 8:1-26). The Israelites caught up with them and killed almost the entire army except a few who took refuge in the rock Rimmon for four months. Besides Gibeah, the Israelites also killed the inhabitants of other cities of Benjamin and torched their houses. Even their livestock were not spared; at the end of the battle, the entire tribe of Benjamin was almost wiped out.

Question 5: What can we learn from the eventual defeat of Benjamin by Israel?

While the Israelites were purged of their overconfidence and presumption, the Benjamites appeared to have fallen into the same delusion. Their victory run in the first and second battles had made them complacent and less discerning. But unknown to them, Israel had undergone a transformation and God had restored his support towards His penitent people.

Sinners and backsliders must ponder the fate of the Benjamites and quickly turn to God. A sinner may prosper and seem to escape divine retribution, but it is only for a while. Those who appear to prosper while living wicked lives are treading on slippery ground and their destruction will be so sudden and calamitous.

Question 6: Point out some sundry lessons you learn from this study.

Of the conflict between Israel and Benjamin, there are many lessons for the believer. One, there are times we may suffer temporary defeat while pursuing a just cause. In such cases, we should examine ourselves, do necessary spiritual stocktaking and launch out again. Two, we should not give up, even when it appears evil is winning over righteousness. We must remember that **“the triumphing of the wicked is short and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment”** (Job 20:5). The psalmist said, **“I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found. Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace”** (Psalm 37:35-37).

Three, those who justify and defend the wicked make themselves liable to God's wrath. The Sodomites and rapists in Gibeah should not have been shielded by the Benjamites. Shielding them showed they approve of their evildoing. As a result, they partook of the divine judgment against the ungodly. Four, the major cause of conflict among believers is sin. Becoming partisan or tribal when it comes to dealing with plain issues

makes conflict to escalate in the church. Five, we see the necessity of self-examination before judging others. The children of Israel needed to judge themselves and atone for their own shortcomings before avenging the sin of the Benjamites.

Six, we must learn to develop and use appropriate strategies in carrying out God-given assignments. Regardless of the advantages we seem to have, we cannot dispense with the use of proper strategy in our spiritual warfare. Seven, members of a Bible-believing church should learn to correct and discipline erring members in love, seeking their restoration and not their humiliation. In everything, we should humble ourselves and have an eye for God's glory.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	1 Corinthians	5	Isaiah	35-36
TUE	"	6	"	37
WED	"	7	"	38
THUR	"	8	"	39-40
FRI	"	9	"	41
SAT	"	10	"	41
SUN	"	11	"	43

END OF OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES

BEGINNING OF NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

669 Lesson

WARNING AGAINST UNEQUAL YOKE

MEMORY VERSE: “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?” (2 Corinthians 6:14).

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 6:14-18

Right from the Old Testament narratives to the dispensation of grace, God frowns at unequal yoke between believers and unbelievers. By creation and redemption, believers belong to God in body, soul and spirit. The implication of divine ownership is that believers occupy a special place in God’s heart (Deuteronomy 7:6). Believers are a **“chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people... called [you] out of darkness into his marvellous light”** (1 Peter 2:9). This shows that the believer is God’s property and cannot be **“unequally yoked together with unbelievers”** who are controlled by the devil.

In the text, Apostle Paul urges believers not to form a binding relationship with unbelievers as such would weaken their Christian conviction, commitment and obedience to God and His word.

A proper understanding of parallels in the text presents unarguable contrasts and convey divine expectation of believers’ lifestyle in the world. The perpetually conflicting parallels are: **“righteousness”** versus **“unrighteousness”**, **“light”** versus **“darkness”**, **“Christ”** versus **“Belial”**, **“he that believeth”** versus **“an infidel”** and **“temple of God”** versus **“idols”**. None of these can ever pair for good. In one group is God, Christ and believers but in the second is Satan, demons and unbelievers.

Question 1: Explain the contrasts in the text and their implication for the believer.

COMMAND TO SEPARATE FROM THE WORLD (2 Corinthians 6:14; Ephesians 5:7-11; 1 Corinthians 5:9,10; 10:20,21; Deuteronomy 7:2,3)

“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?”

Unholy intimate relationship between a believer and an unbeliever is what Scriptures refer to as unequal yoke. The text opens with a military term which calls the Christian soldier to keep in his own ranks; and not leave the Christian community to join that of the heathens. The questions which follow in the succeeding verses show that there was a sort of fellowship that some Christians had formed with the heathens and if not speedily checked would infallibly lead to final apostasy. Even in the Old Testament, God commanded the Israelites to separate themselves from the heathen around them. **“And ye shall not walk in the manners of the nation, which I cast out before you: for they committed all these things, and therefore I abhorred them... I am the LORD your God, which have separated you from other people. And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine.”**

Avoiding unequal yoke with unbelievers does not mean that the Christian must give up his lawful trade, profession, business, for then he **“must needs go out of the world”** (1 Corinthians 5:10). Although believers are not expected to isolate themselves from unbelievers for the sake of winning them for the Lord through the gospel, they should not go into marriage, business or close personal relationships that could make them to compromise their faith.

Sadly, today, some believers go into unequal yoke with unbelievers in marriage. They do this without giving a thought to the negative implication of their action. Unequal yoke is practised in marriage when a believer,

man or woman, goes to marry a sinner or a so-called Christian of questionable character.

Friendship is another area a Christian goes into unequal yoke. Believers must be careful of the type of friends they keep. If a true Christian's bosom friend is an enemy of the cross, s/he is into unequal yoke. **"Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God"** (James 4:4).

Entering business partnership with a non-Christian is unequal yoke. Besides, when a believer picks up chieftaincy titles, becomes extravagant in naming, weddings, burial and even 'house-warming' ceremonies like unbelievers, they compromise with the world.

Question 2: What is unequal yoke? Mention areas we must watch?

As Christ cannot be in agreement with Belial, believers who have discovered God's light through repentance from sin and faith in Christ should have no fellowship with the works of darkness. The Christian and heathen act on very different principles. And everyone who is a true believer and determined to please the Lord will be earnest in renouncing the world and seek to order his life by God's standard.

CAUSES OF UNEQUAL YOKE (2 Corinthians 6:15,16; Genesis 16:1-3; Mark 14:10,11; 2 Timothy 4:10; Joshua 9:3-21; Judges 14:3; 2 Samuel 17:1-4)

Without a clear view of the believer's identity, it will be difficult to survive the pressure to compromise. The Bible teems with records of people whose lives should serve as warning to contemporary believers. The journey which culminates in unequal yoking begins from a point: not taking heed to the warnings of God.

Question 3: Enumerate the causes of unequal yoke.

Some of the reasons most believers go into unequal yoke with unbelievers include: inordinate affection (2 Samuel 17:1-4); impatience (Genesis 16:2,3); willful disobedience (Judges 14:3); worldliness and carnality (2

Timothy 4:10); covetousness (Mark 14:10,11); business or military alliance (2 Chronicles 18:1-3); and ignorance (Joshua 9:3-21).

One strong reason the believer must not get into unequal yoke is that he is indwelt by God. He is **“the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people”**. The implication is that God, his Father will supply all his needs and guide him aright in all things. Indwelt by God, the believer cannot live by the principles and lifestyle the god of this world has dictated for his own people. **“Thus saith the LORD, Learn not the way of the heathen...”** (Jeremiah 10:2). In language, dressing and attitude, the believer must show he is the holy temple of God, and be wary of unequal yoke in every aspect of life because of the great consequences in time and eternity.

CONSEQUENCES OF UNEQUAL YOKE (2 Corinthians 6:17,18; 1 Samuel 28:6; 1 Kings 11:1-5; Numbers 31:7,8)

Unequal yoke often leads to compromise; it makes the believer to **“touch... unclean thing”**. It steadily weakens the foundation of his spiritual strength. Besides, it will imperceptibly cool off the fervency of spirit which attended his first love.

The Lord’s warning to Israel against unequal yoke in marriage was in view of its dire consequences that the heathen spouses will **“turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly”** (Deuteronomy 7:3,4). Unequal yoke in marriage has led to the outright backsliding of believers who were once heaven-minded.

The Scripture is replete with characters who slipped into unequal yoke and lost their relationship with God. When Saul was anointed king of Israel, he had a good relationship with the Lord. But when he later resorted to familiar spirits, he did not hear from God anymore; he died a backslider. Samson’s life and ministry were cut short as a result of unequal yoke. Prophet Balaam died in battle while fighting against the people of God.

King Solomon’s heart was turned away from the God of his fathers when he married Ahab’s daughter and had **“seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines...”** (1 Kings 11:3). King Jehoshaphat lost a fortune with the ship on the sea for doing business with the goddess.

Question 4: Highlight some consequences of unequal yoke and the path to restoration.

CALL TO SEPARATION AND RESTORATION (2 Corinthians 6:17,18; 2 Timothy 2:19; 7:8,9; Hosea 14:4; Joel 2:25-29)

God is calling all who are like Ephraim who **“hath mixed himself among the people”** whom **“strangers have devoured his strength”** to separation and restoration. **“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty”**. Response to His call through repentance from all known sins, and faith in Christ bring restoration to sonship. Aside the Fatherhood of God, there will be restoration of all blessings lost and assurance of living with Him in heaven for believers who abide in Christ till the end.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	1 Corinthians	12	Isaiah	44
TUE	“	13	“	45
WED	“	14	“	46-47
THUR	“	15	“	48
FRI	“	16	“	49
SAT	2 Corinthians	1	“	50
SUN	“	2	“	51

670 Lesson

THE PURSUIT OF PURITY IN THE CHURCH

MEMORY VERSE: “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1).

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 7:1-16

Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians revealed the problems, pressures and struggles of a church called out of a pagan society. He addressed a variety of issues in the lifestyle of the brethren, including factional tendencies, pride, litigation, immorality, idolatry, abuse of the Lord’s Supper and spiritual gifts, among others. On a particular instance, he instructed that a sinning brother be placed on discipline as a warning that sin must not be tolerated in the body of Christ.

The chapter under consideration provides us with the positive outcome of the discipline: the backslidden brother “**sorrowed to repentance**” (verse 9) and got restored. This account brought comfort to the Apostle’s heart in spite of his many ministerial tribulations and trials. Thus, when rebuke or discipline is carried out with the right motive and received with the right attitude, it brings about repentance and restoration to those concerned.

Apostle Paul rejoiced greatly that the primary purpose of his first epistle through Titus had such a positive impact in the lives of members of the church at Corinth. They developed the right attitude towards sin and those who might try to defile the church. Therefore, he exhorted the brethren to pursue and perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord. Reading through his epistles to the churches, Paul never hid his desire and utmost pursuit of purity in God’s church which is “...**the pillar and ground of the truth**” (1 Timothy 3:15).

THE PURSUIT OF A CONCERNED MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL (2 Corinthians 7:1-7; Galatians 1:6-12; 2 John

3:1-3; Matthew 21:12,13; Hebrews 12:14)

“Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1).

The apostle refers to the promises mentioned in the last three verses of the preceding chapter as strong reasons for believers to follow after holiness. Christians are saved so that they can be partakers of God’s holiness. The use of the phrase “...**Let us cleanse ourselves...**” is clear proof that believers have a part to play in remaining holy unto the Lord. Every believer has a part to play in cleansing himself from “**the filthiness of the flesh and spirit...**” which is capable of defiling him and the church.

<p>Question 1: What do you understand by “filthiness of the flesh and spirit”? How can the church be cleansed from it?</p>

Filthiness of the flesh connotes external pollution, defilement by outward actions committed in the body, such as impure words, idolatry, adultery, fornication, incest, sodomy, murder, drunkenness, revelling, etc. Filthiness of the spirit has connection with internal pollution or defilement through internal acts of the mind: evil thoughts, lusts, pride, malice, envy, covetousness and such like (Mark 7:21-23). Our world teems with spiritual pollutants capable of destroying the believer’s testimony of holiness. There are scenes of pornography, immorality, inordinate affection, lust of the eyes and the pride of life which the believer must avoid in order to remain holy. We are to make conscious efforts at stemming these agents of pollution from gaining the mastery of us.

Paul challenged the believers to receive him and his associates as they have not wronged or defrauded anyone (2 Corinthians 7:2). He said this, either because some felt that he had been too severe with the discipline he placed on the incestuous man or because some false apostles and teachers had polluted their minds against him. Whatever the case, the Apostle was sure that the testimony of their integrity was public knowledge. “**Ye**

are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe ” (1 Thessalonians 2:10). In contrast to any unwarranted ill- feeling towards him, the apostle to the Gentiles said, **“ye are in our hearts to die and live with you”** (2 Corinthians 7:3). He, together with other ministers were willing to sacrifice everything for the believers’ spiritual advantage, even to the point of death.

Apostle Paul’s concern for the physical and spiritual welfare of the brethren in all the churches that God helped him to establish was never in doubt. In his affectionate manner, when he came to Macedonia, after leaving Troas, he was anxious to know the success of his first epistle and how the brethren fared (2 Corinthians 7:3-7). No doubt, they suffered from opposition of pagans, Jews and false brethren; **“without were fighting”** and **“within were fears...”**. Hence, he became apprehensive lest the teachings of the false apostles should have perverted their minds from the truth and corrupted the church. No wonder he was relentless in intercession: **“Always in every prayer of mine for you... Making mention of you in our prayers... Praying always for you...”** (Philippians 1:4; 1 Thessalonians 1:2; Colossians 1:3). However, the apostle and other leaders were comforted by the feedback they received from Titus, **“...When he told us your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me, so that I rejoiced the more”** (2 Corinthians 7:7). Christian workers and ministers should always evaluate the impact of their work, efforts, programs and messages on the life of the flock. They should be interested in the growth and progress of believers under their watch to ensure that their labours are not in vain.

Question 2: What should be the pursuit of every genuine Christian?

Every Christian should seek to perfect **“holiness in the fear of God,”** by resisting and avoiding sin in all its inviting and seducing forms. We should also set the fear of God before our eyes.

News of the brethren’s **“earnest desire”** and **“fervent mind”** caused the Apostle to rejoice in spite of the

numerous challenges he faced in the course of propagating the gospel. Nothing encourages and gladdens a Christian servant's heart than to see that his labour for the Lord is prospering (3 John 4).

THE POWER OF TRANSFORMATION IN THE GOSPEL (2 Corinthians 7:8-11; Acts 2:36-38; 4:4; 6:7; 14:21-25)

Ministers of God do not have regret for declaring the totality of the truth. Nothing else has the potency to convict and convert a soul that has gone astray like the undiluted gospel (Psalm 19:7). Speaking to the Romans, he said, **“for I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth...”** (Romans 1:16).

Paul's epistle brought about **“godly sorrow”** which produced genuine repentance, transformation and complete change of heart and conduct among the Corinthians. Some may sorrow and yet not repent of their sins. Judas Iscariot was a good example (Matthew 27:3). He regretted that he betrayed and sold his innocent Master but did not genuinely repent of his sins. On the other hand, Peter was forgiven and restored back to the faith because he repented genuinely after he denied Christ. The brethren at Corinth sorrowed after a godly sort because they realized that they had sinned against God.

Question 3: Differentiate between “Godly sorrow” and “the sorrow of the world”

Godly sorrow makes its victim restless till he or she finds pardon through the mercy of God. It leads to salvation, newness of life and assurance of going to heaven. But the sorrow of the world leaves sinners in their old way which leads to death, destruction and eternity in hell.

Question 4: From 2 Corinthians 7:11, mention evidences of transformation that the gospel brought to the Corinthian church.

The Apostle's epistle made the Corinthian Christians obedient to the gospel. **“What carefulness it wrought in you...”**. They became wary of sin and its consequence.

Secondly, they were cleared from guilt and condemnation as they took steps to put away evil from among them. Moreover, they had vehement desire to rectify what went amiss. Thirdly, they had the right attitude towards sin and the sinner, especially the ones among them. Lastly, they were submissive to leadership and developed zeal for God's work and His house.

THE JOY AND BLESSEDNESS OF AN OBEDIENT CHURCH (2 Corinthians 7:12-16; Hebrews 13:7,17)

"...Wherefore, though I wrote unto you, I did it not for his cause that had done the wrong, nor for his cause that suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear unto you (2 Corinthians 7:12-16). Paul reiterated that his epistle to the church was not simply to get the delinquent punished or to merely do justice to those who had suffered as a result of the sin found in their midst. Rather, it was for them to have the fullest proof of his fatherly affection for them, and his concern for the honour of God.

Moreover, the highpoint of his joy and comfort was that the Corinthians were obedient to the word of God written to them. First, they carried out the discipline which he ordered and refused to cooperate or compromise with the offender in his depravity. This should be the attitude of true Christians who are not to be part of the syndicate that aids and abets sin in any form in the church. The position of all members – leaders and workers alike – should be consistent with God's standard against sin. Second, Paul had confidence in their obedience and trusted that he would not be disappointed. **"For if I have boasted any thing to him of you, I am not ashamed; but as we spake all things to you in truth, even so our boasting, which I made before Titus, is found a truth "** (2 Corinthians 7:14). Third, the report of Titus to Paul in Macedonia about the improved state of the Corinthian church, their love for the Apostle as well as Titus, coupled with their reverence for the latter's authority as Paul's representative, whom **"with fear and trembling ye received him..."** made the apostle to testify he had **"confidence in you in all things"**. This painted a clear picture of the joy and blessedness

that should exist in any Bible-based fellowship where obedience to the word of God form the catch-phrase of every member.

While ministers labour over their members, members should reciprocate same through godly affection, reverence, obedience to the word and righting all wrongs like the Corinthians did. **“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your soul...”** (Hebrews 13:17). This gladdens the heart of ministers and causes them to labour with joy. Disobedience among members of a church, on the other hand, makes the work of a minister difficult, burdensome and uninteresting.

Question 5: How can you describe a blessed church?

In conclusion, the Apostle was now fully persuaded that the scandals which threatened to destroy the foundation of holiness in the church and divide it along factional lines had been put away. He now believed that oneness or unity in pursuit of holiness was feasible among them; that they were on the path of being restored to biblical purity and excellence. Now, their character was firmly fixed to do the will of God. These are the expectations of every servant of God from the members. Nothing short of these would gladden the heart of a pastor or shepherd of God’s flock. Assured of a new dawn among the brethren occasioned by these positive developments, the Apostle joyfully remarked: **“I rejoice therefore that I have confidence in you in all things”** (2 Corinthians 7:16).

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING			EVENING	
MON	2 Corinthians	3	Isaiah	52
TUE	“	4	“	53-54
WED	“	5	“	55
THUR	“	6	“	56-57
FRI	“	7	“	58
SAT	“	8	“	59
SUN	“	9	“	60

671 Lesson

PATTERN AND PRECEPTS FOR GODLY GIVING

MEMORY VERSE: *“And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God” (2 Corinthians 8:5).*

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 8:1-24

The previous lesson dwells on maintaining purity in the church through conscious efforts of every member to cleanse oneself from all forms of filthiness and discipline erring members. In any Christian assembly where members possess pure hearts, there will be self-sacrificing love. Paul the apostle proceeds from the subject of purity to exhort the Corinthian church, in the text, on the necessity of showing charity toward the poor saints in Jerusalem and Judea. He challenges them to emulate the good example of the churches in Macedonia who made contributions to alleviate the suffering of poor believers at Jerusalem due to war, famine and persecution. The Macedonian churches graciously rose to their rescue by giving financial assistance, though they did not personally know them. They gave generously in spite of their deep poverty and intense persecutions. The Macedonian churches comprised of those in Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea which were planted by Paul and his team during their second missionary journey.

Question 1: What can we learn from the concern of Paul for the brethren in Jerusalem?

Though Paul was called the apostle to the Gentiles, he cared also for the Jews who were Christians as well as those yet to be converted (Romans 9:1-3; 10:1). Present-day believers must be like-minded by sparing thought for brethren in adversity and practically supporting them. Christian leaders are to follow the good example of Paul by using practical and scriptural illustrations in their messages in order to stir up the faith of their

congregation to give sacrificially to the work of God, support church projects and help the needy brethren.

PATTERN OF SACRIFICIAL GIVING DESPITE PERSONAL CHALLENGES (2 Corinthians 8:1-6,9; 9:6-8; 1 Kings 17:8-16; Mark 12:41-44; Luke 6:38; Proverbs 11:24,25; 22:9; Galatians 6:7-10; Exodus 25:2; Deuteronomy 15:10)

Paul the apostle commended the charity of the Macedonian believers. Though he did not make any request, they pleaded or compelled him to receive their contribution for the brethren in Jerusalem. They knew that whatever they gave to God, either in support of His work or to meet the needs of His children, would reciprocate divine benevolence. Paul's testimony concerning them that they were joyful despite intense persecutions, and liberal, notwithstanding their extreme poverty, is proof that believers can live out practical Christianity in spite of outward negative circumstances. It is obviously an expression of God's grace when extremely poor people show great liberality.

The secret of expressing such commendable liberality despite one's poverty lies in genuine conversion. The Macedonians first surrendered their lives to God and were saved from sin; thereafter, they submitted to their God-appointed leaders. Everyone needs to give his/her life to God first before giving their substance to Him. Stinginess and holding back from God are manifestations of a heart that is not surrendered to Him. If we yield ourselves fully to God and acknowledge His divine ownership of all things, we would find it easy to part with anything He demands from us. Prevailing negative economic situations should not hinder us from participating in a good cause for Christ's glory.

Question 2: What are the principles of Christian giving from the example of the Macedonian believers?

The exemplary giving of the Macedonian churches furnishes believers with the following principles: one, they must first give themselves to God before their substance. Two, negative circumstances and poverty should not hinder us from giving generously to God

and His people. Three, we should give voluntarily and willingly without compulsion. Four, our giving must be purposeful and timely. Reasons for giving are to advance God's work, help the needy, lay treasure in heaven, prove our submission and devotion to God, and thank Him for His manifold blessings (Philippians 4:15-18; Proverbs 19:17; Galatians 2:10; Matthew 6:20; Deuteronomy 14:22,23; Malachi 1:6-8). Five, when we begin a good work of charity, we must continue to the end. The Corinthians began their preparation to give to the brethren in Jerusalem over a year; at some point, their zeal cooled off until Paul stirred them up. Whenever we make pledges to support God's work, we must redeem them. Six, we should give in proportion to our income. Seven, giving is a practical proof of our love to God. Eight, giving requires grace. Believers will give promptly and freely without complaining or murmuring if they have God's grace. The Israelites were enabled to give for the construction of the tabernacle; the widow of Zarephath sacrificially supplied Elijah's need; the woman of Shunem took care of Elisha; the widow in the temple cast all her living into the treasury; and the Macedonian believers gave to needy Jewish believers out of their deep poverty because of their grace-filled hearts (Exodus 25:1,2; 35:4,5,20-29; 1 Kings 17:8-16; 2 Kings 4:8-13; Mark 12:41-44).

Question 3: Why do people fail to give? Point out its effect in the church.

When people lack the grace to give, there is much sluggishness in making contributions to support God's work, and ministers have to devise several methods to motivate people to give. During the reign of Solomon, people gave abundantly but it was more out of necessity than from willing minds. As soon as Solomon died and his son took over, people sought relief from the burden, which led them to revolt and divide the kingdom (1 Kings 12:1-19).

In the times of prophets Haggai and Malachi, people were more concerned about their personal gain and comfort than God's work. The result was that the construction of God's house became an abandoned project, people gave

the bad portions of their possessions to God and failed to give even the minimum tithe that God commanded (Haggai 1:1-5; Malachi 1:6-8; 3:8-12). The consequence was that there was protracted poverty and financial loss.

PRECEPTS OF SCRIPTURAL GIVING FOR CHRISTIANS (2 Corinthians 8:7-15; 9:8; 13:14; Matthew 20:28; Philippians 2:6-8; Exodus 16:18; Mark 12:43,44)

In verses 7-15, the apostle used several cogent precepts to motivate the Corinthians to this good work of charity. First, he urged them to grow in the grace of giving just as they were growing in other gifts and graces (2 Corinthians 8:7). The Corinthians abounded in faith, utterance, knowledge, diligence and love. They were really charismatic and fervent but appeared slow when it came to practical sharing of their substance. We learn that our spiritual growth should not be lopsided; we must grow and abound in every virtue. Christian giving is a virtue we all need to develop and sustain.

Second, he pointed out the example of our Lord Jesus who gave up His heavenly riches and became poor so that we can be rich. The Son of God became the Son of man so that we could become sons of God. Christ is our perfect Example (2 Corinthians 8:9; 9:15). The example of the churches of Macedonia was a pattern present-day Christians should emulate.

Third, there must be willingness, good intention and zeal to begin the good work. It was necessary for them to perform what they purposed, and finish what they had begun (2 Corinthians 8:10,11). It is not enough to have good desires, there must be a performance of that which is purposed.

Fourth, there should be mutual dependence in the body of Christ. God does not share financial resources equally among His children. His design is that the strong should support the weak and those who have excess should supply the lack of those who do not have enough. It would be recalled that the brethren in Jerusalem for whom contributions were solicited once had enough. At the inception of the church, they

pooled resources together and none of them lacked (Acts 2:44-46; 4:34- 37). But things changed and there was need among them. The needy person today can become the possessor of great wealth tomorrow. So, we should exercise caution in the way we treat those who have little of this world's goods. Let our abundance supply their want today so that tomorrow, if there is lack, their abundance may also supply our need. The contribution of relief by the Gentile churches for the brethren in Jerusalem illustrates the interdependence of the church worldwide. Believers belong to one body and what a section lacks, the other supplies.

Question 4: What are the precepts used by the Apostles to stir up the Corinthian Churches to give unto the brethren in Jerusalem?

PRACTICAL SINCERITY AND INTEGRITY IN MONEY MATTERS (2 Corinthians 8:16-24; Romans 12:17; 14:18; 1 Thessalonians 2:7-10; Philippians 2:25; 2 Corinthians 7:4,14; Revelation 17:17)

The apostle showed a pattern of transparency and integrity in handling money in the church. Rather than handle the contribution of the churches directly, he set up a team of honest men with proven integrity to be in charge. This way, there was a system of checks and balances to prevent misappropriation. This arrangement also freed Paul from any accusation of personal enrichment from the proceeds of the people. It is the duty of all Christians to act prudently in money matters to forestall suspicion. While it is needful to act uprightly in the sight of God, we must also endeavour to provide things honest in the sight of men. An honest character and a pure conscience are requisites for usefulness in Christian service.

Paul refused to have the entire management of the funds (1 Corinthians 16:3,4). Though he was honest, he permitted the Corinthian church to appoint someone among them whom they trusted to join in managing the funds. He knew his enemies may find occasion to accuse him falsely. He therefore insisted on having someone appointed by the churches to handle the contributions. In our dispensation, when large sums of money are

committed to ministers for gospel projects, it is wise to follow Paul’s example for the sake of accountability and scrutiny. Ministers should commit financial matters to trusted and faithful hands to avoid any occasion for slander. Our usefulness as ministers depends on our irreproachable character. Transparency in life and money matters should be the watch-phrase for every heaven-minded believer and minister.

Question 5: What can ministers and believers learn from the way Paul handled money in the early church?

DAILY BIBLE READING				
	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	2 Corinthians	10	Isaiah	61
TUE	“	11	“	62
WED	“	12	“	63
THUR	“	13	“	64-65
FRI	Galatians	1	“	66
SAT	“	2	Jeremiah	1
SUN	“	3	“	2

672 Lesson

THE PRACTICE OF ACCEPTABLE GIVING

MEMORY VERSE: “Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7).

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 9:1-15

The scriptural precept of sharing our material substance with the needy occupies a place of prominence in Christ’s teaching and the apostles’ exhortation to believers (Luke 6:38; 1 John 3:17). In the preceding chapter, Apostle Paul attributed the generous liberality of the Macedonian church to **“the grace of God bestowed”** on them. Therefore, the basic condition for acceptable giving is genuine salvation experience.

Question 1: What is the basic condition for acceptable giving in the sight of God?

Apostle Paul, in our text, was very earnest in articulating the importance of giving to needy saints. He also clearly outlined the acceptable way of performing this Christian obligation so that it can be most profitable to both the giver and the beneficiaries. He underscored how acceptable giving brings glory to God.

PRINCIPLES OF ACCEPTABLE GIVING IN THE CHURCH (2 Corinthians 9:1-6; Romans 15:25,26; 2 Corinthians 8:2; Galatians 6:10)

The basis of Paul’s appeal for freewill offering from the Corinthians was the need to send material relief to the saints in Jerusalem, consequent upon the famine there (Romans 15:25,26). It is obvious from our text that the church at Achaia and that of Macedonia had needs of their own. In fact, out of their **“deep poverty”**, the Macedonian church **“abounded unto the riches of their liberality”** (2 Corinthians 8:2). Their exemplary giving teaches us that it is wrong to think that we must satisfy all our needs before we can give, either to finance

a gospel project or meet the urgent needs of our brethren. Contrariwise, occasions that call for our giving should be regarded as opportunities to prove our unconditional obedience to the word of God. **“As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith”**. If we pray for, and receive the grace of acceptable giving, we will always be looking for opportunity to give.

The apostle’s appeal was addressed to the church in Achaia. No doubt, there must have been members in that church who were economically better off than others. However, no economic group was particularly recognized and none was excluded. The tendency to refrain from giving generously until we are personally recognized or isolated into a special group falls short of biblical examples. Also, no one is exempted from giving because of his or her low economic status. The truth is, God does not prize the size of what we give but the faith which underlies our giving. The sacrificial giving of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:9-16) and the widow who cast only a mite into the treasury that was commended by Christ reveal godly attitudes in giving that believers need to emulate.

<p>Question 2: Mention at least three important principles to be observed in giving acceptably to God.</p>

PROPERTIES OF ACCEPTABLE GIFTS (2 Corinthians 9:2,7-9; Hebrews 10:24; Proverbs 27:17; Matthew 25:41-46; Proverbs 11:25)

From the text, it is apparent that the church in Achaia had an earlier notice and had promised enthusiastically to make the contribution now being demanded. Their earlier overwhelming response to Paul’s appeal provided effective basis of his challenge to their sister church in Macedonia. He puts it thus: **“your zeal hath provoked very many”**. The situation here is neither that of carnal comparison nor of unhealthy competition. Instead, it is a commendable example of how our action and commitment to the Lord can be instrumental in provoking our brethren to greater love for God, commitment to His church and other good works (Hebrews 10:24).

Such mutual encouragement is one of the benefits of Christian fellowship. We must always consider how our words and actions may affect the brethren and the glory of God in the church.

“Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren, that they would go before unto you, and make up beforehand your bounty, whereof ye had not noticed before” (verse 5). Sending Titus and some brethren to the Corinthians ahead of time underlines an important property of an acceptable gift – that of being deliberate and free, not imposed or extorted under pressure. The notice beforehand would enable **“every man (to give) according as he purposeth in his heart.”** Acceptable giving should be thoughtfully determined.

Besides, it must also be free from every form of coercion or competition with others, **“not grudgingly or of necessity”** but cheerfully. Also, it should be bountiful. The bountifulness of the gift must be relative, being defined by both the giver’s ability to give and by the size of the need of the person to be relieved or the cost of the project.

The Scripture reveals that the bountifulness of our gift connects with the richness of divine blessing we expect from our giving. The Apostle employed the agricultural imagery of sowing and reaping to drive home his point. **“But this I say, he which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully”** (verse 6). A farmer who expects a bountiful harvest is careful about the quality and quantity of the seed he sows.

<p>Question 3: Mention three important properties of an acceptable gift in God’s sight.</p>
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Giving to the needy and for the support of gospel projects is an expression of the believer’s confidence in God’s ability and in the integrity of His word. Giving, particularly when it is not bound by compulsion of duty or done to get the applause of fellow men, ranks high in God’s sight as a distinguishing characteristic of His children. On the other hand, insensitivity to the plight of our fellow men or the cause of the gospel will attract

His displeasure (Proverbs 21:13; Matthew 25:41-46). It is an evidence of the sincerity of our Christian profession (James 1:27). Selfless giving to the needy brings divine favour, mercy and prosperity upon the giver (Isaiah 58:10; Proverbs 11:25), besides securing peace and safety (Psalm 41:11).

Question 4: Mention other places in the Bible where blessing and favour are promised to those who give to the needy or the work of the gospel.

PROFITS OF ACCEPTABLE GIVING (2 Corinthians 9:10-15; Psalm 112:9; 2 Corinthians 8:9; Romans 5:17; 6:23)

The Scripture promises good return on investment for giving to the needy or gospel projects. **“Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness”** (verse 10).

Faith in the infallible word of God frees us from the wrong notion that we become poorer when we give bountifully to the cause of the gospel or the needy. As a seed sown into the soil would eventually germinate and yield fruits, whatever we give acceptably is far from being lost. A farmer may choose to eat all his grains, but he will be wiser and richer by deferring his enjoyment and sowing them. Rather than being impoverished, the resultant harvest will be greater than what was sown.

Thus, acceptable giving does more than enrich the giver. One, it glorifies God by yielding many thanksgivings unto His holy Name by the gratitude of beneficiaries of the gift. Two, there is joy in those who are relieved by the gift. Three, those who promote the collection of the gifts are fulfilled. Four, the bond of unity and mutual concern is strengthened (1 Corinthians 12:26). Five, all who love the Lord will be happy that the will of God is done and the cause of the gospel advanced. Besides, it is a demonstration of God’s grace in the church.

Question 5: Explain how the practice of acceptable giving brings praise to God and joy to men.

Apart from the blessing of obedience to God, the prayer of the recipients for givers brings further blessings.

Those who are relieved by the generosity of the givers can best recompense their benefactors through prayers.

Finally, the Apostle ends his address with a note of exultant prayer: **“Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.”** His heart must have zeroed in upon the love of God expressed in the gift of His only begotten Son – Jesus Christ. While he spoke of the necessity of sacrificially ministering to one another, he must have thought upon the greatness of the sacrifice of Christ and how incomparable it is with our call to sacrifice. **“For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich”** (2 Corinthians 8:9).

A sinner, being destitute of the treasure of God’s grace cannot give acceptably. He must first receive the **“unspeakable gift”** of God – our Lord Jesus Christ. Then, he is qualified to give of his substance with faith in the riches of God’s grace and faithfulness.

Question 6: What is the greatest gift a man can receive from God and what is its effect in man’s ability to give acceptably?

Faith in God’s omnipotence and faithfulness will lead us to liberal, cheerful and thoughtful giving and position us for the limitless possibilities of God’s temporal and eternal blessings. **“And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work”**.

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING			EVENING		
MON	Galatians	4	Jeremiah		3
TUE	“	5	“		4
WED	“	6	“		5
THUR	Ephesians	1	“		6
FRI	“	2	“		7
SAT	“	3	“		8
SUN	“	4	“		9

673 Lesson

SAINTS' SPIRITUAL WARFARE

MEMORYVERSE: "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds" (2 Corinthians 10:3,4).

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 10:1-6

One ill in the Corinthian church which Paul the apostle tackled in the text was that she harboured false apostles who doubled as critics of his Christ-like lifestyle and soul-saving ministry. They alleged that when he was present with them, he would appear low and humble in disposition but when absent, he would write with authority which they felt was not only fickle but also an expression of pride and carnality. They stopped short of calling him a hypocrite who walked in the flesh.

The Apostle responded to the slander by justifying his meekness and gentleness towards them as Christ-like. Since Christ, whose example he was following, was intolerant of sin by His act of cleansing the temple, the Apostle feared he might demonstrate similar Christ-like boldness towards false apostles who misunderstood his change of disposition as being carnal and self-seeking. Like Christ and Paul, Christian servants must be lowly in heart and lifestyle while growing intolerant of sin and falsehood. They must be careful in handling information about their spiritual leaders to avoid doing the devil's work of peddling falsehood. If anything, the Apostle recognised that falsehood was a tool the devil wanted to use to cast aspersions on his apostleship and ministry. Thus, this study furnishes us with the reality of an on-going spiritual conflict, its essence, proper disposition for successful execution and the potency of weapons at the disposal of saints.

Question 1: Mention three Christ-like attributes of Paul the apostle in the text that should characterise all believers.

PORTRAIT OF A SAINTLY WARRIOR (2 Corinthians 10:1; 5:20; 6:1; Numbers 32:27; Jeremiah 1:10; 23:29; Matthew 11:28,29; 1 Corinthians 4:1,2; 1 Peter 2:22,23)

Since sin originates from Satan, he inspires and controls sinners to live contrary to the plan and purpose of God. Sinners are enemies of God and Satan finds them as tools with which he fights against God's plan of redemption for mankind. In this regard, false prophets were the tools he used to fight against the soul-saving ministry of the Apostle. No matter how Christ-like a believer or minister of God may become, the devil will still engage him in battle. Satan always hates people and things God loves. He is angry that the believer is not only off his hook, but also entitled to great privileges he has lost permanently. It grieves him that the genuine Christian is in partnership with God to continually liberate hell-bound captives. His main grouse is not with the economy or career of the believer but his spiritual life and soul-saving activities.

Satan's attempt at any of the former is merely a means to an end: he contends for the precious soul. However, the believer has a sure anchor in God who has always made good His promises to defend, uphold, enhance and glorify His saints (John 10:10; 2 Timothy 4:18). Each believer should therefore confidently maintain a consistent conviction, comportment as well as commitment to the Lord.

Unless one is holy, he will always be on the losing end in spiritual warfare. Therefore, saintliness is a precondition for effectiveness in spiritual battle. Like Paul, the lifestyle of a believer should follow the example of our Savior and Lord. **"Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ..."** (2 Corinthians 10:1). While meekness is the strength of the spirit that enables and empowers a believer to calmly accept or suffer wrong without bitterness, gentleness implies mildness in temperament and character which manifests in tenderness and care for the feelings of others. They both infuse a humble disposition and an amiable quality in a personality. The Greek culture to which Corinth belonged normally equated these virtues with weakness. However, they are honoured by God,

displayed by Christ and come as fruit of the Spirit. In Christian service, they engender a self-effacing trait that magnifies the Lord rather than the minister or his gifts (Numbers 12:3; Matthew 5:5; 11:29; Galatians 5:23; 1 Thessalonians 2:7).

Question 2: Why is it important for saints to be meek and gentle?

These attributes are very important for a believer because they help him to submit to the word of God unreservedly on all matters (James 1:21). Two, they are highly valued and appreciated spiritual ornaments for the discerning (1 Peter 3:4). Three, they facilitate cordiality in Christian fellowship as they enhance forbearance and forgiveness, lubricants that reduce friction in relationships (Ephesians 4:12; Colossians 3:12-15). Four, they help a believer to be considerate of others in recognition of his own unenviable past. This, in turn, inspires patience and hope that current sinners could be prospective converts and potential instruments for God's glory (Titus 3:2). Five, they are powerful agents for the restoration of the faltering and halting (Galatians 6:1). Six, they are essential for fighting the good fight of faith (1 Timothy 6:10-12). Seven, they are evidence of divine wisdom (James 3:13,17). Since these two are part of the fruit of the Spirit, they are actually inseparable in the real sense. The absence of one puts a question mark on the authenticity of the other in the life of a believer.

Question 3: Briefly comment on the lifestyle of a saintly warrior.

Being conscious of the continuing and unending nature of the devil's antagonistic schemes, the saint is always on guard and does not open the door of his soul to Satan. He realizes that he who fights on the side of God cannot be a property of the devil. **"He that is born of God does not commit sin"** (Ephesians 4:27; 1 John 3:8-10). Knowing that the offer of sin is a snare for the soul of the saint, he vehemently refuses it on a continuous basis.

The saintly warrior cannot afford to be ignorant of the devices of the enemy through false brethren, false vision and prophecies, false ministries and miracles,

and damning suggestions from dear ones (Nehemiah 6:10-14; Job 2:9; 2 Corinthians 2:11; Galatians 2:4; Revelation 2:6). While not being a victim of the spirit of suspicion, agents of the enemy can be known by their fruits, tried by the illumination of the word of God and by the operation of appropriate spiritual gifts (2 Samuel 22:29; Isaiah 8:20; Matthew 7:16-23).

A saintly warrior does not love the world. Rather, he is so committed to pleasing the One who has chosen him to be a soldier, by devoting quality time to hearing, reading, meditating on the word of God and fellowshiping with the Lord (2 Timothy 2:4; 1 John 2:15-17).

Being so persuaded of the unfailing promises of God, the battle-ready saint is so courageous to lead the Christian life and to fight the battle of the Lord. He is always spiritually kitted, being always sensitive to the Lord (Joshua 1:5-9; Ephesians 6:10-18).

PURPOSE OF SAINTS' SPIRITUAL WARFARE (2 Corinthians 10:1-3; Galatians 2:20; Hebrews 12:1; Romans 8:5; 1 Corinthians 4:15-17; 11:1,2; 1 Timothy 6:12)

Using diverse means, Satan tries to truncate or corrupt a Christian's service or ministry through distraction, temptations, persecutions, aspersions and heresy (Luke 8:12; Acts 13:8; 1 Thessalonians 2:18; 2 Timothy 3:10-12). Paul had to contend for the spiritual welfare of believers who were being swayed by certain Judaisers. From the beginning, Paul had tutored his converts, both by doctrine and practice, to live according to Christ's superior admonitions at the expense of their debased national culture. In like manner, ministers and workers in contemporary church setting should preach against cultural practices which contradict the doctrines of Christ. These false doctrine peddlers vaunted and bragged about their credentials which, due to their background Greek culture, appealed to some members in the Corinthian church and attracted them to the soul-damning heresies.

Question 4: Give reasons for Paul's toughness through letters.

Being a very conscientious and faithful apostle, Paul's over-riding consideration and concern in ministry was to make his converts full followers of Christ alone (1 Corinthians 2:1-5; 2 Corinthians 11:2,3). Now, he was apprehensive that they might be deceived and lured away from Christ into perdition. The change in situation necessitated a change in disposition and approach. While he was with them, he was weaning them for Christ, but with this sad development, he had to war with their enemy to claim them back to the Deliverer.

This challenges contemporary believers to double efforts to confront strongholds over the tempted, tried, persecuted or afflicted in the churches; to **“earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints”** (Jude 3).

Spiritual battles can also be fought to claim promises for personal, family, financial or ministerial breakthroughs and victories over challenges in order to appropriate God's provisions and promises. In addition, Christian workers and leaders have to engage in rigorous spiritual battles in the course of the Kingdom expansion campaigns. Reaching regions hitherto unreached and breaking new grounds in evangelistic outreaches requires that we neutralise and overpower the evil princes that might have been in charge hitherto.

Spiritual battles can be quite intense and involving. But they cannot be won with physical weapons. George Duffield appropriately captures it this way:

*“Stand up, stand up for Jesus, Stand in His strength alone;
The arm of flesh will fail you, ye dare not trust your own:
Put on the gospel armour, and watching unto prayer;
Where duty calls or danger, be never wanting there”.*

Question 5: Comment on the contrast between physical and spiritual weapons in ministry.
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Paul's antagonists boasted of their learning, exulting rhetoric and oratorical prowess. Actually, there is nothing wrong with these as long as they are subsumed under the superior weapons of the Spirit. In fact, it will

be tantamount to indolence and parochialism for any contemporary Christian to discourage literacy or good sermon delivery on the pretext of spirituality (Acts 7:22; 1 Corinthians 7:21- 24). Paul himself had all that his antagonists prided themselves on – respectable Jewish background, enviable learning and certification, letters of commendation from the apostles in Jerusalem, and more. Yet, he down-played all these for the excellency of Christ (Acts 15:22-29; 22:3; 2 Corinthians 11:22-27; Philippians 3:7,8). Christians should develop themselves in any legitimate exercise for greater usefulness. Good as these are however, they are still ineffective in the defence of the gospel or the onslaught against the hordes of hell without spiritual weapons. **“Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God”** (Ephesians 6:13).

Paul the apostle made bold to debunk the allegation that he and fellow ministers lived by the dictates of or **“walked according to the flesh”**. He expressed this clearly in his epistle to the Roman believers. **“Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live”** (Romans 8:12,13). Believers live as humans (walk in the flesh) but **“do not war after the flesh”**; they do not fight physical battles. The servants of God must not strive. We fight spiritual battles with spiritual weapons.

POWER OF SAINTS’ SPIRITUAL WEAPONS (2 Corinthians 10:4-6; Joshua 6:20; Psalm 110:2; Isaiah 41:14-16; Jeremiah 23:29; Zechariah 4:6,7; 9:10; Acts 13:12; 1 Corinthians 1:18-24; Ephesians 6:10-18; 1 Thessalonians 1:5; Hebrews 4:12; 11:30-33)

“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds...” (2 Corinthians 10:4). Physically, a stronghold is a fortified place that is secured from incursion by perceived enemies who seek to capture their targeted preys. In spiritual terms, it is a place where a particular anti-gospel group, activity or set of opinion or dogma thrives. It generally keeps the inmates in check, limits their liberty, and puts them in bondage. The devil

often builds invisible stronghold of culture, traditions, philosophies or religions around some sinful captives either against their will, with their consent or as a consequence of covenant entered with their dead or living representatives.

The truth however is, saints of God can withstand any wile or antic of the devil. By wielding the sevenfold weapon of truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, helmet of salvation, the word of God and prayer. Besides, fasting and prayer, praises, the blood of the Lamb and the name of Jesus are unfailing weapons at the disposal of the righteous (Ephesians 6:10-18; Matthew 17:21; Revelation 12:11; Philippians 2:9-11).

No matter how formidable an evil stronghold may be, God's army can penetrate, crack and bring it down. **"Nevertheless David took the strong hold of Zion: the same is the city of David"** (2 Samuel 5:7).

God-given spiritual weapons are potent in **"Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ"**. There exist imaginations (thoughts that are contrary to the plans and purposes of God), things and personalities that assume positions above the word of God, and seek to neutralize the knowledge of God people hear to reduce or prevent it from bearing fruit and also prevent the spread of the gospel. Though **"the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?"** (Psalm 2:1-4; 83:4-8,17,18; 21:11), the Lord will laugh His foes to derision and accomplish His purposes when saints embark on spiritual warfare.

Through the spiritual warfare of the early church, Paul, who **"verily thought he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus..."** became an apostle who bore His name to the Gentiles (Acts 26:9). As saints lead godly lifestyle and faithfully preach and pray, current persecutors can emerge as intercontinental preachers like Paul.

The weapons are also capable of revenging all disobedience to the gospel by false teachers of any sort and in any place in this gospel dispensation. **"And**

having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled” (2 Corinthians 10:6). The incidents of Bar-Jesus, the Philippian damsel, Herod and other catalogue of exploits in Scripture, as well as those through contemporary anointed ministers convince and assure of the power of spiritual weapons to revenge disobedience or resistance to the gospel (Acts 8:9-13,19-24; 13:6-12; 17: 29-34; 19:19,20).

Question 6: Why is the believer’s obedience an indispensable condition for divine vengeance on the disobedient?

However, Paul placed divine vengeance on condition of complete obedience of the Corinthians to the gospel. God is not unrighteous to fight for a disobedient believer against a disobedient demon or false prophet. All children of God obey Him in all things. Those who disobey God’s precept on restitution, marriage, holy living, and evangelism, among others lose the right to enforce obedience and enjoy divine vengeance on the devil and his agents.

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING			EVENING	
MON	Ephesians	5	Jeremiah	10
TUE	“	6	“	11
WED	Philippians	1	“	12
THUR	“	2	“	13
FRI	“	3	“	14
SAT	“	4	“	15
SUN	Colossians	1	“	16

END OF NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

BEGINNING OF SPECIAL STUDIES

674 Lesson

TOTAL FREEDOM FROM SIN

MEMORY VERSE: “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God” (1 John 3:9).

TEXT: 1 John 3:1-10

John the beloved, in the text, celebrates the glorious freedom everyone who is saved enjoys in Christ. It amazes him that God takes the initiative to forgive sinners who are by nature given to wicked works. Considering the justice of God which stipulates death penalty for every sin that man commits, nobody on earth – as long as he is conceived and born by a woman – would escape His judgment. But His supreme love chose to punish sin in the sinner’s Substitute, thereby giving opportunity for man to enjoy His salvation. Love made Jesus to accept this divine verdict of suffering death penalty for the sins of mankind. Truly, there is no **“greater love”** than this: the righteous dying for the unrighteous. Love is strong as death.

Question 1: Describe the wonder of God’s love as manifested in your life, family or in the life of a fellow believer.

For love, He bore the pains of crucifixion and died to rescue us from present and eternal doom. He also rose to give us strength to live a life of total freedom from sin. **“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not”** (1 John 3:1).

TRANSFORMATION THROUGH GOD’S LOVE (1 John 3:1-3; John 3:16; 1:12; Romans 5:5-8; Galatians 3:26; 4:6; Romans 8:15; 2 Peter 1:4; John 8:36; Romans 8:2; Galatians 5:1)

The word “**behold**” summons our attention to the gracious work God’s love has wrought in us by reason of which we are now distinct in character and lifestyle from the people of the world. God’s love is so deep that we cannot fathom it. The manner of love which God has bestowed upon us is so wonderful and unique that eternity will be too small for us to unveil its mystery. It was while we were yet sinners that Christ died for us. The Bible says, “**Scarcely, for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die**”. Every one of us would have been banished to hell forever were it not for the mercy and love of God.

Question 2: What are the steps a sinner/backslider needs to take to be set free from sin?

In love, God makes sinners to become his sons/daughters. Though the Scripture declares that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; and that the wages of sin is death, God planned man’s salvation even while the sinner is still relishing his sinful pleasures. This was the reason He gave us the greatest gift on earth. “**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).

Jesus suffered, died and rose again so as to forgive, cleanse and save every sinner from sin and make him a child of God. This gracious transformation God does in the lives of people does not come by wishful thinking. It happens through the sinner’s acknowledgment of the great love and sacrifice of Christ at Calvary, praying for forgiveness and cleansing in the shed blood of Christ, and receiving Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord. “**But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name**” (John 1:12). The words, “**becomes the sons of God**”, reveal that all are not children of God (Ephesians 2:3; 5:6; Colossians 3:6; Luke 15:11-24) but are, at the point of repentance, transformed from who and what they were to another spiritual state of newness of life and character. Everyone who repents of his sin and receives Christ by faith is not only set free from sin but also given power to live a new life of righteousness.

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

DISTINGUISHING MARKS OF GOD’S CHILDREN (1 John 3:2-10; Psalm 86:5; 1 John 1:9; Romans 8:16; 6:1,2,18,20,22; Titus 2:11,12; John 8:32; Galatians 5:1)

The major identifying mark of every child of God is total freedom from sin. So, the greatest title anyone can obtain in this world is that of being called a child of the Most High God. Many religious people do not have the assurance of total freedom from sin and being called children of God. They cannot boldly declare with other children of God that **“Beloved, now are we the sons of God”**. Incidentally, it is this assurance that births the hope of seeing Christ at His coming, that makes believers bold to affirm their conviction that **“we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is”**.

<p>Question 3: How may one know that he/she has become a child of God?</p>

Assurance of salvation is a function of faith in God’s truthfulness and power to do whatever He says. He cannot lie. When He declared in the Scriptures that He is **“ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon [Him]”**; that, **“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”**, He fulfils His part in the lives of those who do their part by genuinely repenting of their sins. And when we humbly pray to Him, He answers because He delights in our freedom from sin. We know this from His word, not from our feelings or the whispers of the devil, the liar, who seeks to confuse us.

Besides, God sends the Spirit of His Son into the heart of everyone who is converted to assure him that he is now His child. Those who do not have this initial deposit of the Spirit of God that **“beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God”** do not belong to Christ. It is this same Spirit that kindles holy passion and love for God, His word and people in the heart of the believer. By His operation, the believer who is set free from sin hungers to know more of God through regular

fellowship attendance and constant reading, studying or listening, meditating and praying-in the word of God. As a child of God, he finds the Spirit helping him in prayer, calling “**Abba, Father**”. As a new creature, God hears and answers his prayer of faith as this is the only communication line through which he can receive more grace for abundant and victorious Christian living. Thus set free from sin, the believer is to seek to fit into the mould of Christ, to be conformed to His life of righteousness as the express image of the Almighty God.

Question 4: Mention two erroneous beliefs that encourage loose living by professing ‘believers’.

God does not have any sinning child. Those who are not free from sin are not His children. In the days of John the beloved, the Gnostics taught that conduct is not important to the spiritual man and that whatever actions he puts forth, he can never be defiled. There is modern-day Gnostics. Preachers who tell us that we can live anyhow as long as we believe in Jesus are “**forgers of lies**” (Job 13:4). It is not only what we believe, how we behave also matters. That is why Apostle John devoted time to proving that there is a marked difference in lifestyle and conduct between those who are saved and those who are not free from sin. And believers today should not be deceived by the spurious claims of so-called believers who still live in sin and claim to have received the grace of God. If anything, the grace of God teaches us that “**denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world**”.

Loose living encouraged by the doctrine of eternal security of believers is the bane of present-day Christianity. The Apostle Paul knew that everyone who receives God’s grace is free from sin. He says, “**What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?**” It is the height of self-delusion to live in sin among the choristers, ushers, ministers, workers, and feel comfortable that you are a child of God. Sin is “**the transgression of the law**” of God or lawlessness. A saint cannot engage in illicit

affairs or impregnate another man's daughter, tell lies, steal, curse, fight, or kill.

The uniform testimony of Scripture is that it is not possible to be a sinner and a saint at the same time. **"Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness... For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness... But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life"**.

The word of God is so clear on the standard of conduct expected from professing believers. Those who really abide in Christ do not sin. Those who claim that they are in Christ and are living in sin are deceiving themselves. He that does righteousness is righteous; for a righteous man is known by the righteous acts which he does. For if a man sins, it is evident that he is not abiding in Christ. To taste of eternal salvation requires that we abide in Christ till the end. Abiding in Christ is not only evidence that the believer is totally free from sin but it is also an antidote to falling into sin and be lost. **"Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him... Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin... he cannot sin, because he is born of God"**. It is dreadful to be given this portion to read at the gate of heaven as reason for disqualification from entering in. But the truth is that one cannot claim ignorance of it anymore. If it were not possible to be free from sin Christ would not have declared **"sin no more"** and **"go and sin no more"** to those who received forgiveness from Him before His crucifixion (John 5:14; 8:11). Obviously, His death and resurrection place us on a higher spiritual platform to live a life of complete freedom from sin.

It is a terrible thing to be ensnared into sin. Sin stings like scorpion and injects poison into the spiritual life blood of compromisers. It should not be once named among us **"as becometh saints"**. Sin is horrible. It grieves God, annoys the Spirit of God and displeases the Savior. Sin is deadly: it spreads and kills with reckless speed. It were better for a believer to die than for him to taste the bitter dregs of sin. So, the believer should hate sin and

steer clear of it. Those who toy with sin and promise themselves to repent later are only gambling with their chances of seeing God on the last day because they may never return. Therefore, to yield to the seductions of sin is to secure accommodation in eternal hell.

Today, many people play religion. They love outward show but they lack true freedom from sin. Such people may make loud professions, shout hallelujah a thousand times and attend every Christian conference, they cannot claim to have experienced scriptural Christianity unless they are free – totally free from sin. If we do anything in the name of religion but lack personal freedom from sin, we are deceiving ourselves. True Christianity is centered on entire freedom from sin. Anyone who has not reached the point of having nothing to do with sin, has not discovered or experienced God's great purpose for his life.

The Bible has therefore given us a clear yardstick for determining false and true profession: **“In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.”** From the total revelation of Scripture, we have seen that we are either children of God or children of the devil. It is important that we examine ourselves lest any of us become lost through the deceitfulness of sin.

PURPOSE OF CHRIST'S SACRIFICE (1 John 3:5,7-9; 2 Peter 1:3; Deuteronomy 30:6; 1 Peter 1:15,16; Matthew 5:8; Hebrews 12:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:23,24; 2 Corinthians 7:1)

From our text, Christ **“is pure”**, **“in him is no sin”** and **“he is righteous”**. The uniform testimony of Scripture is that He lived a sinless life. He once enquired from His critics, **“which of you convinceth me of sin?”** His enemies confessed that they could find no sin in Him. Pilate said: **“I am innocent of the blood of this righteous man”**. Believers are saved to pattern their lives after Christ who is our perfect Example. They are saved to do righteousness and good works as He did. Anyone who does evil and sins shows he is of the devil because Christ does not save us to live like the devil.

Question 5: Mention the benefits sinners and saints can enjoy from Christ's sacrifice.

Christ was “**manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.**” He came to the world to save sinners. His entire mission was opposed to sin. To commit sin is to render the death of Jesus useless; to run counter to His holy nature and to prove that we do not know Him (1 John 3:8,9). Those who sin belong to the devil. A true believer “**doth not commit sin**”. Sin is so strange to saints that they cannot speak a sinful word or act in a sinful manner. A true child of God cannot touch sin. “**He cannot sin because he is born of God**”. He has been “**renewed... after the image of him that created him in true holiness**”. He is so filled with the nature of God that he cannot sin. Therefore, those who sin cannot claim that they belong to God.

Christ was “**manifested to take away our sins**”, not only our outward sins but also our inbred sins. Doing good works and loving our brother with uninterrupted pure motive can only happen when we are sanctified. At sanctification, He destroys the rock-nature of inward sin and implants His nature of righteousness that makes us obey and love Him perfectly. God sanctifies the believer who hungers and prays earnestly by faith for this experience.

Questions 6: Why is sanctification an indispensable experience every believer must possess?

The declaration of the Scripture concerning this indispensable experience should unsettle those who are contented with just being saved. Christ says, “**the pure in heart**” are blessed because it is only they that can see God. Where then is the blessedness of your Christian profession if you cannot see God at the end of life, having failed to obtain this experience that Christ's sacrifice has procured for you? How do you hope to get to heaven having not possessed the experience and living in “**holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord?**” Hearts that brew hatred, malice, lusts, evil thoughts and devices, etc. disqualify from seeing the Lord. To be correct in comportment and Christian decorum when

anger, jealousy, and stubbornness are struggling for preeminence in the heart are signs you may not be there to answer during the roll call that will be taken in heaven one of these days. God has a holy intelligence that decodes actions and motives behind them. He knows those who are His, those who He has cleansed from outward and inward sins.

Those who are totally set free and who hope to see the Lord on the last day do not only possess the experience of sanctification but also keep watching, examining and purifying themselves in preparedness for the imminent return of our Lord so as to be found worthy to enjoy the promised inheritance of saints in heaven. **“And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.” “Dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”**

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING			EVENING	
MON	Colossians	2	Jeremiah	17
TUE	“	3	“	18
WED	“	4	“	19
THUR	1 Thess.	1	“	20
FRI	“	2	“	21
SAT	“	3	“	22
SUN	“	4	“	23

675 Lesson

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

MEMORY VERSE: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law” (Galatians 5:22,23).

TEXT: Galatians 5:22,23; John 15:1-8

In Christendom, there is an emphasis on Christian character. Everyone appears to know that the true New Testament Christian life has a striking manifestation of a Christ-like pattern of character. The Scripture gives this character-pattern a pungent expression in Peter’s second epistle: **“And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ”** (2 Peter 1:5-8).

Question 1: What is meant by the expression “fruit of the Spirit”?

These true Christian virtues are collectively called, **“the fruit of the Spirit”** and couched in the best words in Galatians 5:22,23. Here, we have the exact definition of the total Christian personality and a beautiful resumé of Christ’s Sermon on the Mount presented in a most digestible form. It is the character of Christ reproduced in the Christian through the Holy Spirit. It is as though all New Testament principles are wrapped up there.

Some people produce the fruit of human efforts or what may be best described as “works of the human spirit”. Such people strive, endeavour, and by a great exercise of the will produce some fruits – good culture, courtesy, calmness (outward), kindness, endurance – which are

only commendable to fellow human beings. But these products of natural effort are not the fruit of the Spirit revealed in Scripture. They come from man's labour. They are more of man's invention. That is why we call them fruits of human effort or works of the human spirit.

Works belong to the workshop, whereas fruits belong to the garden. Fruit is the silent growth of the abounding life, whereas, work comes from the skilful factory hand. The presence of fruit – the fruit of the Spirit – assigns the grace of the Christian character to the true Source – God.

THE NATURE OF THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT (Galatians 5:22,23; Ephesians 5:9)

In direct contrast to the works of the flesh, Paul the apostle, by inspiration, states the nine fruits produced by the Holy Spirit in the believer. They are: “**love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance...**” (Galatians 5:22,23). They are collectively called, “the fruit”, implying that none is without the other and cannot be whole without others. Therefore, everyone who claims to have the Spirit of God must possess “the fruit” in its entirety.

Being the kernel of Christian character and embodiment of all virtues, a thorough analysis of each fruit is here commended: First, **love** (1 Corinthians 13; Romans 13:10; John 13:34; 1 John 4:7-12). It is interesting to note that the first of these fruits is love.

Question 2: How does love embrace all other fruits of the Spirit?
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In reality, love is the very basic essential life of the living Christ which expresses itself in all the nine fruits. A Christian writer once wrote how the eight other fruits of the Spirit are anchored in love. He said: “Joy is love exulting; peace is love reposing; longsuffering is love enduring; gentleness is love refined; meekness is love with a bowed head; goodness is love in action; temperance is true self-love; and faith is love confiding; so that the whole sum of Christian living is just loving.” Second, **joy** (Isaiah 61:10; Jeremiah 15:16; John 16:22; Acts 8:8; 1 Peter 1:8). Joy is more than happiness. It

comes from the Lord and is anchored in Him. Jesus is the source of joy. The way into this joy is repentance and practical confession of faith in Christ. Money, mansions, might or material wealth never gives this joy. They all give transient happiness which is not better than misery. The book of Acts talks about people being filled with joy in the Holy Ghost. After Samaria received salvation, **“there was great joy in that city”** (Acts 8:6). Paul said, **“the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost”** (Romans 14:17).

This joy transcends troubles and challenges of life; it leaps over tough circumstances and abides through problems, pains and even death. It is unspeakable!

Third, **peace** (Philippians 4:7; Romans 5:1; Psalm 119:165; Isaiah 26:3). Peace is regarded as one of the supreme attainments. It is the state whereby the soul and spirit of man is so imbued with the presence of God’s gracious Spirit that he is not easily provoked. Peace is the selfless, self-giving, self-losing, self- forgetting and self-sacrificing love that is manifest in spite of all adversities of life. Jesus is the source of true peace. He is called the Prince of Peace. If the heart is opened to receive the risen Christ, He comes in, speaking peace – just as He came again and again to His frightful disciples after His resurrection saying, **“Peace be unto you”**. The peace He imparts is the quiet, potent, gracious attitude of serenity and goodwill that meets the bitterness of others with good cheer and repose. This peace is calm in crisis, untroubled in trial and determined in disaster. The peace of Christ transcends trouble; it is the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Fourth, **longsuffering** (1 Corinthians 13:4; Colossians 1:11; 3:12; 2 Peter 3:9; Exodus 34:6). Longsuffering is more commonly called endurance or patience. Longsuffering is the powerful capacity of selfless love to bear all things and continue in adverse situations. It is a generous willingness to try to understand awkward people, disturbing events and unwelcome situations that God allows to come our way. This quality of character was beautifully displayed in Jesus Christ **“who for the joy that was set before him**

endured the cross, despising the shame..." (Hebrews 12:2). Longsuffering possesses the benefits of discipline, development and direction.

Fifth, **gentleness** (1 Thessalonians 2:7,11; 2 Timothy 2:24; Psalm 18:35; James 3:17). Gentleness comes fifth in the package of the "**fruit of the Spirit**". When love, joy, peace and longsuffering abound in the Christian's heart, he is characterized by an unusual but essentially divine gentle lifestyle. Gentleness is God's enduring quality in the centuries of His dealing with man. The gentleness of God has drawn man to Him with a bond stronger than steel. Gentleness, the fruit of the Spirit, is different from natural gentleness which is exclusively enjoyed by loved ones. Gentleness which grows out of the Spirit is enjoyed by all – our friends as well as our persecutors, revilers, scorers, scoffers and all who speak evil against us. Gentleness is loving, appreciating, caring, tending, accommodating and correcting a friend, child or partner in a firm manner.

Sixth, **goodness** (Genesis 45:5-8,15; 1 Samuel 24:17; Acts 7:60; 1 Thessalonians 5:15). Goodness is God's special peculiarity and He puts a great emphasis upon it. When Jesus was physically in the world, it was reported in striking simplicity that He "**went about doing good**". Goodness, the peculiar characteristic of Christ, comes from the life that has received of God's abundant grace. The Christian whose life reflects goodness is one with a noble purpose, strong character, reliable conduct and trustworthy lifestyle. He is kind, good, gracious, generous, gentle, peaceful and joyful and in the business of making others happy. Goodness takes away any sense of pride or patronage.

Seventh, **faith** (1 Samuel 17:37; Psalm 37:3,5; Isaiah 26:3,4; Psalm 125:1). Faith, in its general sense, is our basis for belief. It is the divinely implanted principle of inward and wholehearted confidence, trust in and reliance on God and all that He says. This faith makes the believer rely on God, exercise confidence and assurance in the church, believe the leadership of the church and the brethren.

The basis of our faith is love. The Christian who is full of faith, loves to the point of trusting and yielding himself faithfully to the service of the church and fellowmen. Faith, therefore is active. It puts the best construction on every situation. It searches for any hint of honour in others – men, the Church and God. Faith pushes on, perseveres and remains loyal even when there are reverses and disappointments.

Eighth, **meekness** (Luke 6:29; 1 Peter 3:4; Galatians 6:1; Numbers 12:3). Meekness is the very true nature and character of Christ. Every heaven-conscious Christian needs to understand biblical and Christlike meekness. The meek is gentle, pliant, flexible but *firm* and *frank*. He is strong, courageous and mild. He uses his strength and courage to defend the glory of God. The meek sees the good virtue in others and gives his best to help the brethren to live a happy life. The meek Christian is submissive, quiet, kind, soft and patient especially with the weak.

Ninth, **temperance** (Titus 2:2; Proverbs 16:32; 2 Peter 1:5-7; James 3:2). Temperance is also called self-control, moderation or self-restraint. Temperance seems to be the last and crowning fruit of God's Spirit. It is the outward sign of a well-disciplined life. Temperance means bringing the whole person – body, soul and spirit – under subjection and to do just what Christ wants him to do. That implies that the believer's total personality – mind, emotion and will – is at Christ's command. The entire body's appetites, drives, desires, instincts are governed by God.

<p>Question 3: Explain the nature of any of the fruit of the Spirit you can remember.</p>
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CONDITIONS OF FRUIT-BEARING (John 15:1-8; Psalm 1:1-3; John 12:24; Romans 7:4).

Good as the fruit of the Spirit is, some Christians still find it missing in their lives. Many think it is impossible for someone who has not been baptized in the Holy Spirit to bear the fruit of the Spirit. But this is wrong because the chain of virtues in Galatians 5:22,23 is simply referred to as the "fruit of the Spirit" and not

‘fruit of the baptism in the Holy Spirit’. The fact is that the virtues that are collectively so-called come from the Spirit of Christ that indwells the believer at the point he or she receives Christ as Lord and Savior. This, therefore, explains that the bearing of the fruit is conditioned upon the possession of the salvation experience. At salvation, the Holy Spirit cultivates the ground of the heart of the saved soul to bring forth His fruit.

Question 4: Mention some of the conditions for fruit-bearing.

Mere membership of a church does not qualify anyone to bear the fruit of the Spirit, neither does tithing our income or being involved in church activities guarantee the bearing of the fruit of the Spirit. The journey to possessing the fruit begins with being born again. This means therefore, that everyone that would bear the fruit must first establish a living relationship with Christ, the Vine. He or she must be a branch grafted into the Vine that supplies life and nourishment (John 15:4,5). Second, there is the necessity of abiding in the Vine (verse 4). We must remain and be close to Christ to continue to bear fruit. The power to overcome sin, do good and flourish in the graces of Christ comes from Him. **“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. 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 15:4,5).

Third, we must partake in the divine nature. Every living branch partakes of the nature of the vine and continually does so to remain alive. God’s nature of holiness must manifest in our lives before we can bear fruits unto holiness.

Fourth, we must hold fast to the Vine so as not to be plucked off by the violent efforts of storms and winds. We must walk and hold fast to the Master. Those who follow Him ‘afar’ stand the danger of being removed from the source of their strength and security.

Fifth, believers who wish to bring forth fruits unto righteousness must, as it were, be planted by God’s

“brooks of honey and butter” (Job 20:17). For them the glorious Lord will be unto them **“a place of broad rivers and streams”** (Isaiah 33:21) where they drink consistently to the full.

Sixth, death to the old life (John 12:24). The old life is an impediment to growth in grace and fruitfulness. Sinful appetites and passions inhibit God’s grace so that it does not find full expression. Therefore, those who hope to flourish in God’s grace must put to death the old life of corruption (Colossians 3:5).

Seventh, fellowship and communion (Romans 7:4). It is a natural prerequisite that there cannot be fruitfulness in marriage without the union and fellowship of the couple. In the same breath, believers who wish to bear fruits of grace must be in regular and constant fellowship with Christ, the Bridegroom.

BENEFITS OF THE FRUIT-BEARING LIFE (John 15:7,8; Psalm 92:13,14; Ezekiel 47:12)

The fruit-bearing Christian is beautiful in the sight of God. He exudes fragrance that attracts God’s commendation and blessing. Unlike branches that are severed from the vine resulting in withering away, believers who remain with the Lord and consequently bear fruits enjoy abundance of the juice coming from the Vine.

<p>Question 5: Mention some of the benefits of the fruit-bearing Christian life.</p>

Christ, in the fifteenth chapter of John, commends fruit-bearing Christians and condemns fruitless ones. Among the many benefits of the fruit-bearing Christian life are, one, answer to prayers. **“If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you”** (John 15:7). There is a pledge that heaven would listen to such believers who abide in Christ and are fruitful in Him – His ears are open to the righteous.

Two, God will be glorified in them. What more honour can be earned by a child of God than that His Father should be glorified in Him and he becomes His **“workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works”**?

Three, that the believer bears fruits of grace, righteousness and good works makes him or her like trees (of righteousness) planted by the Lord where the glory of His grace is displayed.

Four, such shall be called disciples of Christ and shall be identified with the Lord – **“so shall ye be my disciples”**. By bearing fruit in Christ shall men know that we are His followers indeed; for by their fruits **“ye shall know them”**.

Finally, age shall not be a barrier to their fruitfulness. **“Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing”** (Psalm 92:13,14). They shall consistently enjoy God’s riches and abundance.

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING			EVENING	
MON	1 Thess	5	Jeremiah	24
TUE	2 Thess	1	“	25
WED	“	2	“	26
THUR	“	3	“	27
FRI	1 Timothy	1	“	28
SAT	“	2	“	29
SUN	“	3	“	30

676 Lesson

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

MEMORY VERSE: “He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ” (John 1:41).

TEXT: John 1:35-51

The thrust of the text is the practical demonstration of an effective, easy and exemplary soul-winning strategy. Beginning with John the Baptist’s concise introduction of the Savior – **“Behold the Lamb of God”**– five different souls, who later became apostles and pillars in the early church, were strategically won to become disciples of Jesus Christ. Andrew, one of the first two disciples who heard John’s timely declaration and became followers of Christ, was able to convince his own brother – Peter – to join him in the decision to become a disciple of the great Teacher.

Christ Himself did personal evangelism. After Andrew had brought Peter to Him, He won the heart of Philip almost effortlessly the following day. Filled with a strong conviction and overwhelming joy, Philip also was able to convince Nathaniel who was initially cynical and reluctant to heed the divine call. The uniqueness of this string of conversions lies in the peculiarity, simplicity, effectiveness of personal evangelism. Besides, the quality of the fruit produced is simply unsurpassed. These basic features make personal evangelism a mandatory, vital and indispensable method of soul-winning for every believer today.

PERSONAL EVANGELISM: MEANING AND MANDATE
(Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-20; John 15:16; Acts 1:8)

Question 1: What does personal evangelism mean?

Personal evangelism is the person-to-person sharing of the good news of salvation, with the aim of leading a

sinner to repentance and turning him wholly to God through Jesus Christ. It is the easiest, cheapest and most effective method of evangelism. It cannot be easily outlawed by any ban on public preaching and proclamation that may affect mass form of evangelism. Through it, the seeker's personal attention is gained, doubts are cleared and the decision made becomes solid and strong. It is the fastest and easiest way of multiplying disciples and reaching any category of individuals in the community.

Personal evangelism is Christ's mandate to every believer. While on earth, His primary preoccupation, purpose, passion and focus was to seek and save those who were lost in sin. **"Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work"** (John 4:34). Having paid the greatest price and sacrifice to redeem lost humanity from the bondage of sin and Satan, His parting charge and challenge to every believer is: **"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature"** (Mark 16:15). The manner and tone of the charge reveals that it is urgent, compelling and mandatory. Thus, the disciples who heard Jesus giving this charge lived to fulfil it (Mark 16:20). The individual members of the early Church also continued in the discharge of this responsibility (Acts 8:4,30-36). Today, no true disciple of Christ will neglect or undermine this mandatory task. Obedience to the Great Commission is demonstrated by individual believers reaching out to sinners with the gospel message on a person-to-person basis.

NECESSITY AND URGENCY OF PERSONAL EVANGELISM (John 4:35; 9:4; Ezekiel 3:17-21; Matthew 24:14).

There is a great and urgent need today for consecrated Christians to give themselves to the task of personal evangelism. The pitiable conditions and descriptions of the sinners' plight demand that every believer should have an insatiable desire for the salvation of souls. The fact and reality of hell as a place of agonising torment and everlasting punishment in unquenchable fire demand that soul-winning should be carried out daily,

diligently, and seriously too (Mark 9:43-47; Luke 16:23; 2 Corinthians 5:11). The value of a soul surpasses all the riches of the whole world put together (Matthew 16:26). The precious blood of Christ was shed to secure its redemption (1 Peter 1:18,19).

It will be too late to reach out to these people after their death or the rapture. Therefore, each of us must take it upon ourselves as a matter of necessity and urgency to rescue these dying souls while there is time, for **“the night cometh, when no man can work”**. The time left for this job of eternal consequence is short (1 Corinthians 7:29-31). The human soul is the battleground between God and the devil. Sad enough, Satan seems to be gaining more ground in these last days through the proliferation of false religions and prophets who are speedily and zealously attracting blinded souls into their nets, making them twofold children of hell. Besides, there are millions of sinners and backsliders, who neither attend church nor any Christian programs. Many of these die daily and go to hell. Unfortunately, some of them reside in our neighbourhoods, while others work in the same offices with us.

If, in a church of a hundred, standing believers can each endeavour to bring a soul to Christ in six months, it means that in one year, there will be four hundred genuine believers in the congregation. The seriousness and great concern of God to save sinners from the wrecking influences of sin and its damning consequences is revealed by His solemn charges (2 Timothy 4:1,2; Mark 16:15; Ezekiel 33:11-19) and His involvement in directing soul-winners to souls (Acts 8:26-29; 10:9-20; 16:9). The Lord Jesus Christ gave time and attention to win Philip, Zacchaeus, the Samaritan woman, the thief on the cross and others. His desire to save souls made Him to die for the sins of the world (John 1:43; 4:7-28; Luke 19:1-10; 23:39-43; John 3:16).

<p>Question 2: How can the church leadership motivate members to be diligently involved in personal evangelism?</p>
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The church should aim at raising an army of believers who will be addicted to personal evangelism. To achieve

this, the leadership of the local church should take the lead and be an example to the flock in this great task (1 Peter 5:3). It should train the people through specially organized weekend evangelism seminars and workshops at both workers' and general retreats. Apart from training, deliberate efforts should be made to organize weekend evangelism outreach, pair believers as evangelism partners in the Home Caring Fellowship and use Operation Andrew cards periodically.

Question 3: Enumerate the benefits of involving in personal evangelism.

When a soul is saved, there is joy in heaven; the community is made better, a family has been helped, a life has been transformed and a multitude of sins has been covered (James 5:20). Also, God's kingdom has been enlarged. There is joy in the soul-winner himself, joy in heaven and a crown of rejoicing awaits him in heaven (1 Thessalonians 2:19,20). The obedient **"... shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever"** (Daniel 12:3). Who would not want to be involved in such a rewarding task!

THE LIFESTYLE OF SOUL-WINNERS (2 Timothy 2:4-6; Matthew 15:14; Isaiah 52:11; John 15:1-7).

Question 4: What should be the lifestyle of the effective soul-winner?

Since the blind cannot lead the blind (Matthew 15:14), genuine conversion from sin is indispensable for everyone who wants to be involved in personal evangelism (2 Timothy 2:6). The soul-winner must be free from spots, blemishes and evil reports so as not to constitute an offence to seekers. As God's channel of the water of life, he must be clean, not rusted or corroded within. Having been saved and purified, therefore, the soul-winner must see himself as an ambassador of Christ, with an unshakable conviction that personal evangelism is a debt and not an option (2 Corinthians 5:20; Romans 1:14; 1 Corinthians 9:16). Third, he must be properly connected to the Source of fruitfulness in soul-winning through prayers and fellowship (John 15:1-7).

Fourth, he must be knowledgeable and skilled in the right application of the Scriptures (Colossians 3:16; 2 Timothy 2:15; Hosea 4:6). Five, he must have a strong conviction about God, the Bible, the indispensability of salvation, the significance of Christ's death and His resurrection and the consequences of neglecting the call to salvation. In summary, to be effective, the soul-winner needs the compassion of a doctor, the courtesy of a nurse, the conviction of a communist and the commitment of a miner. In addition, he should be bold, courageous, persevering as a good soldier of the cross and patient as a good ambassador of Jesus Christ.

EFFECTIVE METHODS AND PROCEDURES IN PERSONAL EVANGELISM (1 Corinthians 9:19-23; John 4:7-29; Acts 8:30-35; John 3:1-3)

Question 5: Mention various methods of personal evangelism. As a believer, which of them have you effectively employed?

Methods or approaches employed in personal evangelism differ from one person to the other. There is the direct approach. This is the abrupt introduction of the vital issue of salvation to a sinner. It is generally done when the soul-winner observes he does not have much time to spend with the sinner. The method involves a direct question about the issue of his soul, relationship with God or readiness to meet God. Jesus and Philip used this method (John 3:3; Acts 8:30).

The indirect method focuses on reaching the sinner's heart by gliding from physical realities into spiritual, eternal truths. It is generally conversational. Jesus did this (John 4:7-29). Friendship method of evangelism involves cultivating a relationship with someone of the same gender with an aim of winning him/her for Jesus. The price to pay includes sacrificial giving, self-denial, hard work and prayer.

Literature method seeks to reach a sinner through the printed work. A Christian tract, magazine, comic or book given out prayerfully, purposefully and passionately can turn a soul to Christ faster than we think. The after-fellowship approach is most appropriate when we want to lead first-timers in our church or in the Home

Caring Fellowship to the Lord. It involves expanding on the message he has just heard, applying it and calling him to decision.

LEADING THE SINNER TO DECISION (Acts 8:26-39; Luke 24:27).

Once the door of soul-winning has been opened, and the most suitable approach decided, the next urgent task of the soul-winner is the presentation of the gospel. He must reach the intellect, affect the will, stir the emotion, arouse the conscience and bring the unsaved man to the point of decision and surrender to Christ.

Question 6: What steps can a soul-winner take to lead a soul to salvation?

To be effective in leading a sinner to conviction and conversion, one, ask questions to discover the class he belongs to and how best to deal with him. Two, describe the disease. Sin, as a disease of the soul, must be revealed with the help of the Scriptures and painted vividly enough that the sinner will discover it (Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Corinthians 6:9,10). Three, prescribe the remedy. Christ is the remedy for sin. Thus, the soul-winner must exalt Christ so high that the sinner will be willing to run to Him for salvation (John 12:32; 1 Timothy 2:5,6; Hebrews 10:19-22). Four, warn him of the danger of delay and rejection of the truth (Isaiah 1:20; 2 Corinthians 6:2; Proverbs 29:1; Hebrews 4:1-6). Five, urge for an immediate decision. If he declares his intention to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, he should be made to pray, confessing his sins and receiving Christ as Lord and Savior (1 John 1:9; Romans 10:9,10). Six, anchor his faith in the Word of God for assurance of salvation. Finally, show him how to continue in Christ.

Question 7: What pitfalls must be avoided when leading a soul to the Lord?

However, there are things to avoid in the course of dealing with a soul. Do not exalt self above the sinner or condemn denominations. Avoid acting victorious or proud when you have scored a point (Matthew 11:29)

and do not tell sad stories, but point to Christ (John 3:16; 2 Peter 3:9). Do not multiply texts and illustrations, never be in a hurry, and deal not with more than one at a time. There is need for care when dealing with the opposite sex. Avoid getting into an argument with the seeker. Do not lose your self-control and emotion. Do not tell seekers to think it over; bring him to a decision at once where possible. Do not be discouraged by apparent failure. Often, you are simply another link in the chain of grace that will bring the sinner to Christ (John 4:37,38). As for outlook, do not have bad breath or body odor.

The soul-winner needs to be familiar with Scriptures that deal with various categories of sinners to successfully penetrate their hearts with the gospel. The various categories of sinners and relevant scriptural passages include:

- the careless (Luke 14:16; Ezekiel 33:9; Acts 24:25; Hebrews 2:3; 12:25; Isaiah 47:8,9),
- the deceived (Matthew 24:5; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 15:33; Galatians 6:7; Ephesians 5:6; 2 Thessalonians 2:3; 1 John 3:7),
- the religious (Matthew 7:22,26; Romans 3:20; 11:6; Ephesians 2:8,9; Titus 3:5; Luke 18:9-14),
- the confused (John 6:37; 8:36; Jude 24; 1 Peter 1:5; 2 Timothy 1:12; Philippians 1:6),
- the superstitious (Acts 17:22-31; 1 Samuel 4:3-14; 1 Kings 20: 23-30; Jeremiah 10:2-13),
- the excuse-makers (Luke 14:16-24; Matthew 24:24,25; Acts 24:24,25),
- the ignorant (Hosea 4:6; Acts 17:23; Matthew 15:14; Jeremiah 5:4; Micah 4:12),
- the anxious (Acts 16:30,31; 2:37; Luke 3:9-14),
- the backsliders (Hebrews 10:38; 2 Peter 2:20; Revelation 2:4,5; Hosea 6:1-3; Isaiah 55:7),
- the free thinkers (Psalm 10:4; 14:1; Romans 1:19-26),

- those who object (Romans 2:1-6; Ecclesiastes 12:13,14) and
- the sceptics (Psalms 10:4; 14:1; 1 John 2:22).

Efforts made in soul-winning will not yield much fruit if follow-up is neglected or relegated to the background. The soul-winner must make efforts to take the convert through series of convert studies and integrate him to the fellowship of the local church. He should also help him to be baptized in water and make him go through discipleship training to further establish him in the faith and doctrines of the Christian faith. The young convert also needs to be shielded from and protected through the soul-winner's constant prayers and visitation. He must be loved and cared for during persecution, difficulty and discouragement so that he does not backslide. Above all, the soul-winner must be willing to sacrifice both his money and material, where necessary, for both the spiritual and physical welfare of the convert (2 Corinthians 12:15; Acts 9:27-30; 10:25,26; 14:21,22).

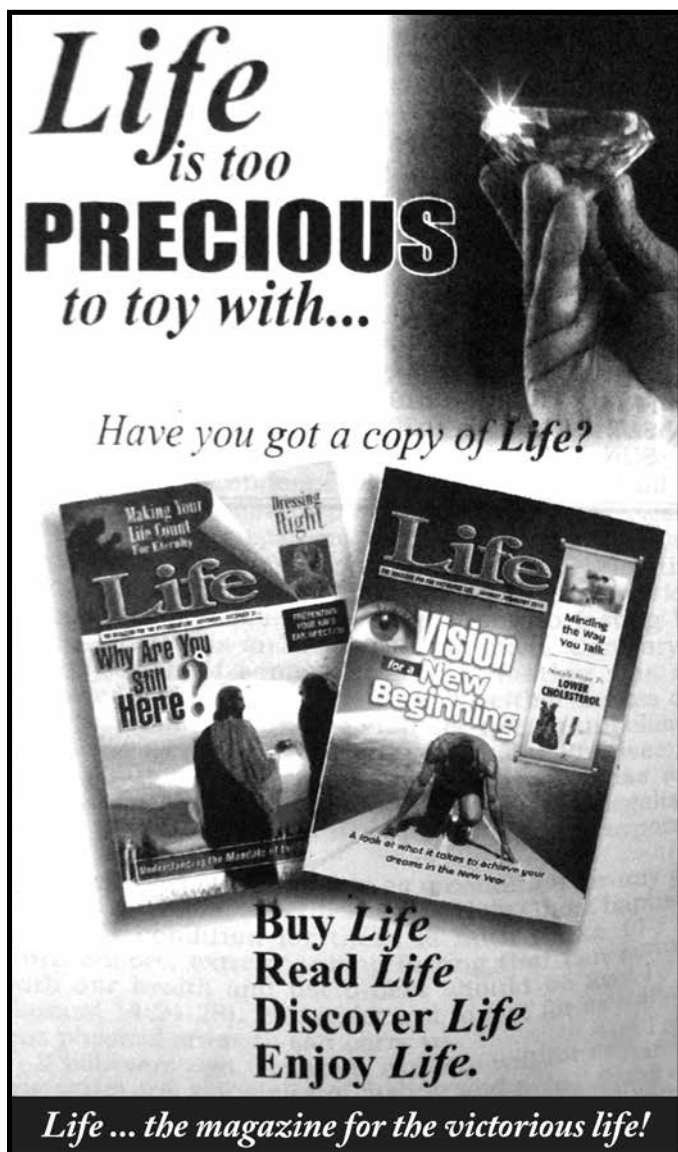
DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING			EVENING	
MON	1 Timothy	4	Jeremiah	31
TUE	"	5	"	32
WED	"	6	"	33
THUR	2 Timothy	1	"	34
FRI	"	2	"	35
SAT	"	3	"	36
SUN	"	4	"	37

THE END OF THE STUDIES, BUT BE ADVISED THE WORD OF GOD IS TIMELESS (DOES NOT BECOME OBSOLETE AT ANY TIME). THEREFORE, ENDEAVOR TO KEEP THIS BOOK HANDY.

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New Jersey	9:00 AM
Bronx/Brooklyn/Queens/Staten Island	9:00 AM
Rockland County	10:30 AM

MONDAY BIBLE STUDY

Rockland County	7:00 PM
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TUESDAY BIBLE STUDY

Bronx/Queens/New Jersey/Co-op City and Staten Island	7:00 PM
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WEDNESDAY BIBLE STUDY

Brooklyn	7:00 PM
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THURSDAY (REVIVAL SERVICE) FAITH CLINIC

Rockland County	7:00 PM
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FRIDAY (REVIVAL SERVICE) FAITH CLINIC

All the Church Locations except Rockland County	7:00 PM
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ALL NIGHT PRAYER VIGILS

Bronx – First Friday of Every Month	7:00 PM
Brooklyn – Last Friday of Every Month	11:00 PM
Queens – First Friday & Third Friday of Every Month	11:00 PM
New Jersey – Third Friday of Every Month	11:00 PM

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