

WRITINGS OF ZAC POONEN - VOLUME 1

by Zac Poonen

A collection of theological writings, sermons, and essays by Zac Poonen (Volume 1), compiled for study and devotional reading.

99 Chapters

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00.00. Poonen, Zac - Library

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01.01. 50 Marks of the Pharisees

50 Marks of the Pharisees by

Zac Poonen

01.03. FIFTY MARKS OF PHARISEES

FIFTY MARKS OF PHARISEES In the gospels we read of three leavens that Jesus warned people against:

1. The leaven of Herod (Mark 8:15) 2. The leaven of the Sadducees (Matthew 16:6) 3. The leaven of the Pharisees (Matthew 16:6) These represent three types of Christians. The leaven of King Herod was worldliness. In Mark 6:20, we read that Herod enjoyed listening to John the Baptist. But two verses later, we read that he also enjoyed watching Salome dance (who was probably scantily dressed and dancing in a sexually provocative way). There are Christians like that today, who can enjoy listening to a powerful sermon on Sunday morning and then enjoy watching a filthy movie the same afternoon. Herod enjoyed listening to John the Baptist because John was a fiery preacher unlike the boring Pharisees. But enjoying listening to a fiery prophet doesn't mean that one is spiritually minded. Worldly Christians are not usually hypocrites like the Pharisees. They enjoy worldly entertainment and don't hide the fact that they enjoy it. The leaven of the Sadducees was false doctrine. They were liberal in their beliefs. They did not believe in angels, or miracles or the resurrection or the spirit world. There are Christians like that today who are "cessationists". They don't believe that God does any miracles today and they don't believe that the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit are available to Christians today. The leaven of the Pharisees was primarily hypocrisy. They were doctrinal fundamentalists and they were righteous in their external lives. Jesus Himself gave them a certificate in these two areas (Matthew 23:3; Matthew 23:25). They tithed, prayed and fasted regularly, and kept the external commandments of the Law and even engaged in missionary work. There are Christians today who do all these things but who are still like those Pharisees.

Some Christians could have a mixture of all of these three leavens. From the above description, one would imagine that Jesus' greatest conflict would have been with the followers of Herod or the Sadducees. But it was not so. His greatest conflict was with the fundamentalist Pharisees who preached holiness! And it was the Pharisees of all people, who were most eager and determined to crucify Jesus.

Today in Christendom, the Sadducees and Herodians are not as dangerous as the Pharisees. A Herodian may be going to hell. But he cannot lead others astray, for it is obvious to everyone that he is a worldly person. As for the liberal Sadducee, no-one is likely to be deceived into imagining that he is spiritual, when he does not believe in miracles or even in the resurrection from the dead. The most dangerous person in today's Christendom (as in Jesus' time) is the Pharisee, who has all his doctrines right, and who preaches "holiness". But his "holiness" is a legalistic holiness produced by laws and rules. And his "righteousness" lacks the "the joy and peace of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17). Such a man is dangerous because he can mislead Christians into a false holiness.

It is important therefore, for us to understand the characteristics of Pharisees. Not much is written about the characteristics of Herod's followers or of the Sadducees apart from what I have already

mentioned. But when it comes to the Pharisees, a great deal is written about them in the gospels. So God must be wanting us to study their characteristics.

All believers whose doctrines are fundamental and who are pursuing after holiness are in danger of becoming Pharisees – without even knowing it. Since most of us fall into that category, let us approach this study with deep humility.

There are at least fifty characteristics of Pharisees that I have discovered in the gospels. If even one of them fits us, then we are Pharisees, even if we don't have the other 49 characteristics. This is not a comprehensive list. If you look into your own life, you may discover some other characteristics that are not mentioned in the Bible. The spirit of the Pharisee is diametrically opposed to the Spirit of Christ. That is why it is so serious. Just as we would not want an atom of the spirit of hell in us, we should not want an atom of the spirit of the Pharisee in us either.

One primary mark of God's blessing is that the Holy Spirit gives us light on ourselves. If we do not progressively get light on the un-Christlike areas in our life, we are not really being blessed by God. Health and wealth are not the marks of God's blessing, because many unbelievers have both of these – even more than most believers. When God shows us areas of un-Christlikeness in our lives, He wants us to cleanse ourselves from them (2 Corinthians 7:1), so that we can partake of His Divine nature. Thus our personal life, family life and church life will become brighter and brighter. We will then be liberated from legalism and only then will be able to fly like the eagles in the sky. We will remain earth-bound if we do not see “the Pharisee within us”.

God gives us His word so that we can have light on ourselves – and not for us to see Phariseeism in others. It is only when we see Phariseeism within ourselves and cleanse ourselves from it, that we can be useful to God in His work.

01.04. CHARACTERISTIC 1

CHARACTERISTIC 1 Pharisees glory in their connection to godly men.

“Do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father’” (Matthew 3:9). A Pharisee knows he is not godly himself, and so he seeks to be associated with “Brother X”, who has a reputation as a godly man, so that he can claim godliness by association. There are many carnal Christians today who glory that they are members of a church that is led by a man who has a reputation for godliness. They live off that reputation, even though they have zero holiness themselves. Pharisees mingle with godly people and imagine that they are holy too.

You can be part of a very good church and yet go to hell, if there is un-repentant sin in your life, or if you have a grudge against another. If you imagine that God will condone and ignore all your backbiting and evil speaking, just because you are a part of a good church, you are mistaken. You will get a big surprise in the day of judgement. Maybe you were saved once upon a time. But you are probably lost today. So don't ever glory in your connection with godly people.

01.05. CHARACTERISTIC 2

CHARACTERISTIC 2 Pharisees glory in external righteousness

Jesus said, “Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:20) What did Jesus mean here? Do we have to fast, pray and tithe more than the Pharisees did?”

Jesus was not talking about quantity at all – but quality. He was saying that the quality of our righteousness must be far superior to that of the Pharisees if we want to enter God’s kingdom. And He went on to explain this in the remaining verses of the chapter. The righteousness of the Pharisees was only external. They gloried in their obedience to the laws of God on the outside. But Jesus said that it was inward righteousness that God looked for – not just avoiding external murder, but avoiding inward anger as well; not just avoiding external adultery, but avoiding inward lusting after women as well.

Jesus said that anger and sinful sexual lust were so serious that a person could go to hell for these sins (Matthew 5:22; Matthew 5:29-30). Most Christians do not take these inward sins seriously – because they are Pharisees. They glory in their external testimony before men. There could be other areas too, where your righteousness is only on the outside. “Man looks on the outside, but God looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7). What other believers think of your spirituality has no value before God. He looks at your thoughts, motives and attitudes. Don’t glory in your reputation before people, if your heart is unclean.

01.06. CHARACTERISTIC 3

CHARACTERISTIC 3 Pharisees do not mingle with sinful people “The Pharisees said to Jesus disciples, “Why is your Teacher eating with sinners?” (Matthew 9:11).

Pharisees will mingle only with their own crowd of “holy” Pharisees. They criticised even Jesus for mingling with sinners. Is your holiness one that prevents you from mingling with your unconverted relatives? It is true that we can find fellowship only with God’s children. But we can be friendly with all. Jesus was known as the “Friend of sinners”. If you want to be like Jesus, you must be a friend of sinners. A Pharisee will not attend the wedding reception of an unconverted relative, because he feels he will be polluted thereby. Jesus however would have gladly attended an unconverted relative’s wedding reception. He went to the homes of sinners, where they probably had dancing and drinking going on. He would share the gospel with those sinners. Contact with them didn’t defile Him because His righteousness was inward. It is true that He spent most of His time with His disciples. But He spent a lot of time talking to sinful people. How can we win sinners to the Lord if we are not friendly with them? A good question you can ask yourself is this: How many people in your church were brought to the Lord by you? Even though you may have been in your church for 20 years, you may not have brought a single person to Christ. Don’t you think this indicates something about your life? Many elders too have not brought a single person to Christ in many, many years. The reason could be that they are Pharisees. If you honestly acknowledge your Phariseeism in this area, God can use you to bring others to Him.

01.07. CHARACTERISTIC 4

CHARACTERISTIC 4 Pharisees are ascetics “Why do the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?” (Matthew 9:14).

Pharisees forced people to fast and pray. They emphasised bodily disciplines like fasting as a means of becoming spiritual and they boasted about it. Jesus fasted even more than the Pharisees. But He did not fast in order to be holy. He fasted because He was holy. And Jesus did not boast about His fasting like the Pharisees. Neither did He ever force people to fast – not when He was on earth and not today. Fasting has value before God only when it is totally voluntary. Otherwise it becomes a dead work.

People of all religions practise some forms of asceticism, like fasting. Some even stop having sexual relations with their wives in order to be holy. But that is not the way for a Christian to be holy. The mark of a perfect man is not that he disciplines himself in matters of food and sex, but that he can control his tongue (James 3:2). Then we must control our thoughts and our eyes.

Jesus could enjoy a good meal. They called Him “a gluttonous man” (Luke 7:34). His very first miracle was making extra wine at a wedding! That looked like one of the most unnecessary miracles that Jesus ever did. Those guests had already drunk so much wine; and Jesus made 600 litres of wine for a wedding party of perhaps 200 guests – which would mean that He made 3 litres of wine per person!! What was the need to make so much wine for them? We would have thought that Jesus’ first miracle should have been a more “spiritual” miracle like raising the dead! One reason why He did this miracle was because He came to demolish a religion of externals that taught, “Don’t touch this. Don’t taste that”, etc.

I have met Christians (in certain denominations especially), who subtly mention their periods of fasting in their conversation. They say words like, “I just want to share with you a precious word the Lord gave me when I was on a 21-day fast recently”. Their main point there is to impress you with the fact that they fasted for 21 days. All their other words are secondary. Jesus however told us never to let anyone know when we fasted. But Pharisees boast about their asceticism.

There is certainly an important place for discipline in eating and sleeping and sexual matters in the Christian life. But this is definitely not a matter that we should tell others about or glory in.

01.08. CHARACTERISTIC 5

CHARACTERISTIC 5 Pharisees are very critical of others in small matters

“The Pharisees said to Jesus, ‘Look, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath.’”(Matthew 12:2). The Pharisees knew that the Law permitted the Israelites to pluck grain to eat, when they walked through anyone’s field. But what they questioned here was why the disciples were doing this “work” on a Sabbath day. Pharisees are very critical of people in small matters. In Matthew 15:2, they asked Jesus why His disciples didn’t wash their hands ritually, as taught by the traditions of the elders. Pharisees are always watching other believers for some small thing to find fault with.

If you are an elder brother and you are like that, then it is likely that your church too is full of Pharisees - because the majority of people in any church usually develop the habits of their elder. We see that in Revelation 2:1-29 and Revelation 3:1-22. If however the elder brother is free from Phariseeism, then the chances are that most of the people in his church will also be free from Phariseeism.

I would say therefore to every believer: Do not follow your church-elder if he is a legalist and a Pharisee. Submission to an elder is required only in church matters and not in personal matters. By that I mean that if he announces that the Sunday meetings will start at 10 am, then obey him and go at 10 am. In the meeting, when he announces Song No.45, obey him and join with the others and sing Song No.45. When he asks the congregation to stand, you also stand. And when he tells everyone to sit, you also sit down. That is all that “submission to an elder” means. But you don’t have to follow his example in his life, if he is not a worthy example to follow. Otherwise, you will destroy yourself too. Follow Jesus Himself and never follow a legalistic, Pharisaical elder – whoever he may be – even if he is the seniormost elder in your fellowship. You must submit to an elder in other areas of your life, only if you have full confidence in him as a man of God.

01.09. CHARACTERISTIC 6

CHARACTERISTIC 6 Pharisees live by rules

“And a man was there whose hand was withered. And they questioned Jesus, asking, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” – so that they might accuse Him” (Matthew 12:10)

Pharisees live by rules. They don't live by the life of Jesus. Their ridiculous rules taught that a sick man must not seek for healing on the Sabbath day. Many leaders of churches today also have made ridiculous rules that make life difficult for their flock. Those Pharisees had asked Jesus this question only “so that they might accuse him”. The same is true of many church leaders today, who also are quick to accuse anyone who violates some small rule that they have made. God is the only Lawgiver (or Maker of rules) in the universe. If you make rules for others in a church, that Almighty God Himself has not made, then you will be acting as if you are God – and that is “the spirit of the antichrist” (See 2 Thessalonians 2:4). Then like those Pharisees, you will end up joining hands with Satan, the “accuser of the brethren” (Revelation 12:10). As an example, take the matter of women veiling their heads. The Bible says that women should veil their heads when they pray or prophesy (1 Corinthians 11:5). But some church-leaders teach that women must veil their heads always (24 hours every day) because they should be “praying always.” But their inconsistency is seen in the fact that they don't insist (by the same principle of “praying always”) that men must therefore keep their heads uncovered always (and never wear a cap or a hat). Their inconsistency is also seen in the fact that they permit the sisters to veil just 15% of their heads (just the back part of their hair, because it is inconvenient to cover the entire head during the heat of the day!!). Pharisees are thoroughly inconsistent, but are blissfully unaware of their inconsistency. The only ladies I have seen who cover their heads fully are some Roman Catholic nuns like the late Mother Teresa. I have found almost all the others who emphasise this as a law (and judge others for not obeying it) to be inconsistent. They are hypocrites and Pharisees. God intended the veiling of the woman's head to be a symbol and not a rule. So I personally don't waste any of my time checking up whether every sister has veiled 100% of her head and whether any strand of hair is visible under the veiling!!

Pharisaical elders are also lenient to their own family members in many matters like this, but strict with others. That's why Jesus told those Pharisees, “If your donkey falls into a pit on the Sabbath day, what will you do?” They cared for their own donkeys, but not for a sick man. Church-leaders need to be very careful that they don't exempt their own family members from the rules they make for others.

01.10. CHARACTERISTIC 7

CHARACTERISTIC 7 Pharisees are motivated by jealousy and hatred “The Pharisees went out and conspired against Jesus, as to how they might destroy Him” (Matthew 12:14). Your jealousy of someone may not reach the point where you kill him. But you must remember that jealousy and hatred are the first steps to murder. This was how Cain progressed: Jealousy....hatred.....murder. The Pharisees were jealous of Jesus because He could do many things they could not do and therefore was more popular with the people than they were. Even Pilate (who knew very little about Jesus) could see that the Pharisees wanted Jesus crucified only because they were jealous of Him (Matthew 27:18). When you are jealous of someone, it will be very obvious in your speech and your conduct.

You can be jealous of someone who can preach better than you, or who has wealth or spiritual gifts that you don't have. Then you will find it very easy to look for some small fault in him in order to criticise him. And you will long to see him fall in some way. The religion of the Pharisees is the religion of Cain. The history of the human race begins with two streams - one spiritual (Abel) and the other religious (Cain). Cain's primary sin was jealousy of Abel. These two streams finally end in Jerusalem (the true church) and the false church (Babylon). If we follow the religious and jealousy-filled stream of Cain, we will ultimately end up as a part of Babylon – even if all our doctrines are evangelical.

01.11. CHARACTERISTIC 8

CHARACTERISTIC 8 Pharisees are suspicious and assume the worst about other people

“The Pharisees said, “This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons.” (Matthew 12:24). When Jesus cast out a demon, the crowds said, “This must be the Son of David (the promised Messiah)” (Matthew 12:23). But the Pharisees were disturbed by the fact that Jesus did something they themselves could not do. And so they assumed the worst.

Even when someone does something good that blesses others, Pharisees will attribute an evil motive for that deed. If, however their own children had done the same thing, they would have boasted about it and attributed the best of motives – because Pharisees are partial towards their own family members, but very critical of others. Pharisees are very suspicious of others and cannot believe that anyone would do anything with a selfless motive – because they themselves are so selfish. If you are a Pharisee, you will find yourself attributing wrong motives for the good that others do and being critical of those whom others appreciate.

01.12. CHARACTERISTIC 9

CHARACTERISTIC 9 Pharisees are very careless in their speech

“The Pharisees said, “This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons”(Matthew 12:24)

Pharisees speak rude and hurtful words about others carelessly and pass judgement on others in their speech. Imagine calling the Son of God, the “head of the demons”!

How did Jesus respond to that evil criticism by the Pharisees? Jesus replied saying, “You have spoken against me, an ordinary man. You are forgiven. But make sure you don’t speak against the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 12:32). Jesus forgave those Pharisees (as a Man). But God in heaven did not forgive them. When we sin against anyone, there are two elements to such a sin – (1) a horizontal element – against the other person; and (2) a vertical element – against God. That person must forgive you; and God must also forgive you, if your sin is to be blotted out. But before God forgives anyone, that person has to repent first. So even if a human being forgives you the horizontal element of your sin, you will still face the judgement of God for the vertical element, until you repent and ask for His forgiveness. If one of those Pharisees had gone to Jesus later and said, “Lord I am sorry for calling you Beelzebul. Please forgive me”, and then asked God to forgive him, then only would his sin have been blotted out, not otherwise. Jesus warned us that we would be condemned by the words we spoke, at the final judgement (Matthew 12:37). Do you have a sickness that is not being healed, despite all your prayers and medical treatment? Is it possible that you have disobeyed God’s command in Psalms 105:15 “Do not touch my anointed, and don’t do any harm to my prophets”? Have you spoken something carelessly about a godly brother? Maybe that is why your sickness is not being healed. Perhaps you have carelessly judged men who are ten thousand times holier than you are and who have done ten thousand times more for God than you have done. Repentance and an apology to that person alone will bring your healing.

01.13. CHARACTERISTIC 10

CHARACTERISTIC 10 Pharisees neglect their family responsibilities in the name of religion

“Why do you transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother’....But you say, ‘Whoever says to his father or mother, “Whatever I have that would help you has been given to God,” he is not to honor his father or his mother” (Matthew 15:1-9). The Pharisees invalidated God’s commandment to honour parents by saying that a person need not support his needy parents if he had given his money in the temple treasury box. Let the poor father be sick and die, because his “holy” son has given his money for missionary work!! A modern-day equivalent would be something like this: The Pharisee would say to his wife, “I have to go for the church-meeting this evening. So I cannot help you with the work at home.” Or he could be sitting with his Bible in the morning studying the tabernacle (in Exodus 25:1-40), asking God to speak to him, while his wife is struggling to get the children ready for school, preparing breakfast for them, and looking after a crying baby. The Lord will be trying to tell this Pharisee, “Shut your Bible, forget about your ‘tabernacle-study’ and go help your wife in the kitchen”! But he cannot hear God, because his Pharisaical ears have become deaf to God’s voice. A major part of our being spiritual is to take responsibility for any work that needs to be done at home. “If a man does not care for his family needs, he is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:8). .

01.14. CHARACTERISTIC 11

CHARACTERISTIC 11 Pharisees are easily offended

“The disciples came and said to Jesus, ‘Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?’ Jesus said, ‘Leave them alone.’” (Matthew 15:12-14). When Jesus corrected the Pharisees for teaching people to dishonour their parents (as we saw above), they were offended. Pharisees are easily offended by any word of rebuke or correction that the Lord may give through an elder brother. One of the kindergarten lessons in the Christian life is to get victory over “getting offended”. There is no hope that you will ever be delivered from Phariseeism if you don’t seek to be totally free from getting offended when corrected. .

I know people who were once in our church who were so offended by some correction they received, that they left the church altogether. They are wandering in the wilderness today and there is every possibility that they will be lost eternally. I can assure you that like the Pharisees, you could be on your way to hell too, if you have been offended by some correction you received.

Jesus told His disciples to “leave them alone”. We are not to go after offended Pharisees trying to bring them back to the church. We must obey the Lord and leave them alone. If they repent, then they can come back to the Lord and to the church. Not otherwise.

01.15. CHARACTERISTIC 12

CHARACTERISTIC 12 Pharisees are spiritually blind

Jesus said, "They are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit" (Matthew 15:14).

Pharisees are great scholars of the Bible. But they are spiritually blind and so they don't have any revelation on spiritual realities. And when these blind leaders lead other blind people, Jesus said "they will fall into the pit (of hell) themselves and those who follow them will also fall into the same pit" (Matthew 15:14).

Never follow a blind man, Make sure your leader/elder is a man of spiritual vision, who loves God's people. Lack of love is what causes spiritual blindness and it leads to preachers preaching in a way that condemns people. A man who loves Jesus sees the Lord so clearly that he can lift Jesus up in His sermon and show Him to you. It is such a leader that you should follow and whom you should long to be like.

01.16. CHARACTERISTIC 13

CHARACTERISTIC 13 Pharisees are hypocrites “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy” (Luke 12:1). The word “hypocrite” is actually a Greek word that has been imported into the English language and means. “actor”. If you went to Greece in the first century and asked people where all the hypocrites were, they would have replied, “At the theatre”. The hypocrites come on the stage there and practise their hypocrisy (acting) for a couple of hours and then go home to live their normal lives. In a Hollywood movie, a man may play the part of John the Baptist and act very holy for a short while, because he is an expert actor. But in real life he may be a drunkard and an adulterer.

Today most hypocrites are found in churches, where they also act their part for a couple of hours on Sunday mornings. They do a great act of praising the Lord at that time, every Sunday. But if you were to go to their homes during the week however, you will soon discover that they were only acting a part on Sunday mornings. In their normal lives at home, they are not praising God, but complaining, grumbling, gossiping and quarrelling with one another. Are you like that - acting a part for others to see in the church meetings, but quite a different person in your office and in your home?

01.17. CHARACTERISTIC 14

CHARACTERISTIC 14 Pharisees seek to catch others in their words

“Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?” (Matthew 19:3).

Pharisees seek to catch people in something they say in order to accuse them before others.

They may even ask you questions to try and trip you up. We read in Matthew 22:15 that “the Pharisees plotted together how they might trap Him in what He said”. (See Luke 11:54 also).

I have had similar experiences too. At times, believers from some churches (who are convicted by what I preach and who want to accuse me of preaching heresy) have visited me and asked me questions in order to catch me in some word that I may say. They are not interested in being free from sin in their lives but only in finding some fault in others. This is exactly how the Pharisees were. They would take Jesus’ words out of context and accuse Him of heresy. Modern-day Pharisees have twisted my words too in a similar fashion..

If we love someone, we will always place the best construction on anything he says. We will say, “Perhaps I misunderstood what he said. Perhaps he was joking”, etc., A Pharisee however will never make such an allowance for anyone. It is written of Jesus that “He would not judge by what His ears heard or by what His eyes saw” (Isaiah 11:3). This is the example that every godly man will follow.

01.18. CHARACTERISTIC 15

CHARACTERISTIC 15 Pharisees are hard-hearted “This people honour Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me.” (Matthew 15:8). The heart of a Pharisee is hard, because it is far from God. If you place butter close to a fire, it will melt immediately. But if you put it in the freezer, it will become hard. It can even become as hard as a rock, so that you will need a chisel to cut it. The heart of a Pharisee is like that. God is a fire, and if you live close to Him your heart will always be soft. Even rocks will melt in the presence of God.

If you are hard towards others, you can be certain that you are living far, far away from God. The Pharisees were hard on others because they were millions of miles away from God. Pharisees honour God with their lips and sing beautiful songs of praise, “O Lord, Thou art worthy”, etc. But they do not judge themselves. A person who listens to God will judge himself always and never judge others - that is one mark of a man who has a soft heart.

I have observed however that even though Pharisees are very hard on people, many of them are very tender towards their own family members. They make rules for others but will not impose those rules on their own family members. They are full of partiality and hypocrisy.

We must have convictions. I have my own convictions as to what I permit myself to possess or to do. But I do not impose my convictions on others, in matters where Scripture is silent. I don't tell people whether or not to have a TV set. I think a computer connected to the Internet is far more dangerous than any TV set. I warn people of the dangers of both of these gadgets. But I do not make rules for others, like the Pharisees do. I know Pharisees who told others never to possess these gadgets, but who had to eat their words later on, when they themselves bought computers out of necessity.

01.19. CHARACTERISTIC 16

CHARACTERISTIC 16 Pharisees cannot appreciate loud praise in public.

“When the chief priests and the scribes saw the children shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they became indignant” (Matthew 21:15).

Pharisees are disturbed when people raise their voice to praise God. They believe that reverence for God demands that His people be silent in His presence or at least subdued in their praise. Jesus however was delighted when He heard the children shouting praises to God because it reminded Him of heaven! Heaven is a place where there is loud and continuous praise – at times as loud as thunder (Revelation 19:6). We haven’t attained to that decibel-level as yet, in our praise meetings. But that is our goal. Pharisees would even be disturbed if someone said an “Amen” or a “Hallelujah” in response to something they heard in a message!! They would look around to see who said it. They feel that such words should not be uttered in a church-meeting! They feel that everyone should sit through church-meetings as though they were in a funeral-service. Watching them while they sing, one would think that they had not yet heard that Jesus has risen from the dead!!!

01.20. CHARACTERISTIC 17

CHARACTERISTIC 17 Pharisees have knowledge without obedience

Jesus said, “The Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them” (Matthew 23:2-3). In Matthew 23:1-39, Jesus exposes more characteristics of the Pharisees than we find in any other chapter in the Bible. Matthew 23:1-39 is a chapter that is the very opposite of 1 Corinthians 13:1-13. To be led by Law is the opposite of being led by Divine Love through the Holy Spirit. So if we want to be led out of Phariseeism and legalism into a life of Divine love, we must study Matthew 23:1-39 carefully. The Pharisees sat in the chair of Moses, which meant that they had gone to Bible colleges and got their doctorate degrees and had a lot of accurate knowledge. Jesus even told His disciples to do all that the Pharisees taught. So what the Pharisees taught must have been right. But they did not obey what they knew to be right.

Knowledge is a very useful thing, but it can also be very dangerous. Knowledge coupled with obedience alone will bring spiritual life. Knowledge without obedience however brings spiritual death. It is better not to have any knowledge at all, than to have knowledge and not obey. Knowledge can be compared to the food we eat and the digestive process to obedience. It is when food is digested that it becomes part of our body. Rice and curry are turned into flesh and bones – a miracle that is no less than water being turned into wine. And our bodies perform this miracle every day!! But if the food we eat is not digested, then that food can kill us – because undigested food will rot inside our stomachs and make us sick. Have you noticed when you vomit, that the food that comes out of your stomach stinks and tastes rotten? It may have been tasty chicken curry when you ate it. But it had a very different taste when you vomited it out. That’s also what happens when we accumulate knowledge and do not obey. And that is why many Christians stink spiritually. The ones who stink the most are the ones who have the maximum amount of knowledge and the least amount of obedience. Pharisees are like that. But the sad part is that they themselves do not realize that they are stinking. A spiritual person however can smell that stink very quickly. A godly man can discern a Pharisee in five minutes of conversation with him. Their eyes are either haughty or full of adultery (Proverbs 6:17; 2 Peter 2:14). Many women who lived a flirtatious life in their unconverted days do not cleanse their spirit fully after their conversion. The result is that even 20 years after their conversion, their eyes are still flirtatious. I say to all young men: Stay clear of such sisters.

01.21. CHARACTERISTIC 18

CHARACTERISTIC 18 Pharisees do not practise what they preach “Pharisees say things and do not do them” (Matthew 23:3). This verse is the opposite of Acts 1:1 where it is written about Jesus that He “did (first) and (then) taught”. The Pharisees taught but did not do. They did not practise what they preached. Jesus however did first and then preached only what He had already done!! These are two opposite spirits. Those with the spirit of the Pharisees will build the harlot church Babylon. And those with the Spirit of Christ will build the bridal church Jerusalem.

Jesus never preached what he had not first done. How long do you think Jesus took to prepare the Sermon on the Mount – (Matthew 5:1-48, Matthew 6:1-34 and Matthew 7:1-29) - the finest sermon that anyone has ever preached? It took Him 30 years to prepare that sermon. It came out of His life and not just from His mind. When you preach a sermon that you heard from someone else, that only comes out of your head. It is mere knowledge. There is neither life nor anointing in it. If you want to preach as Jesus preached, then you must first live the Word and then preach it. Some people have asked me. “Brother Zac, can I preach your sermons in my ministry?” And I have told them, “Yes, if you live them out first and are honest to admit where you got them from.” God says, “Have any of these preachers bothered to meet with Me and listened to Me and then lived out my Word?... I never sent these preachers, I never spoke to them, but they preached anyway” (Jeremiah 23:17-18; Jeremiah 23:21 - Message). When you preach someone else’s sermon, without living it out yourself or telling people where you got it from, you are just seeking honour for yourself. That is a dangerous habit and can result in spiritual death for you, because God has said, “I am against the preachers who get all their sermons secondhand from others and who say, ‘This message is from God’” (Jeremiah 23:30-31 – Message and Living). For some 30 years now, I have tried my best to ensure that I preach only what I have first practised in my life. Let me give you one example: I have never preached anywhere, urging people to go as missionaries to North India. Why haven’t I done that, when many hundreds of missionaries are needed in North India.. Only because I have never lived in North India as a missionary myself.

Now listen to what I am going to say and see if it is not true: Almost every leader of evangelical missionary societies in India lives in the comfort of South India and challenges others to go as missionaries to North India. These leaders send their own children to good schools and colleges in South India. But they tell their missionaries who are in remote villages in North India (where there are no schools) to send their children to some distant boarding schools. I am not here to judge these leaders, for God is their judge. But I do say this that I will never follow their example. I would be a Pharisee if I preached as they did, because I would be asking others to do what I am not doing myself. Only someone who has lived in North India and brought up his children in the difficult circumstances there, has the right to tell others to do the same thing. All the rest are Pharisees. This principle applies in many other areas too.

Don’t ever preach on anything that you have not done yourself. Don’t try to advise parents who have teenage children how to bring them up their teenagers, if you yourself have never brought up

teenage children aright yourself. That would be as foolish as a bachelor telling parents how to bring up their children. Many a time, we can bless others by just praying for them and keeping our mouths shut as far as any advice is concerned. Can you teach Chemistry without studying Chemistry first? No. If your college-degree is in English, you can only teach English. That is such a simple truth that every teacher knows. But Pharisees do not understand something as simple as that.

01.22. CHARACTERISTIC 19

CHARACTERISTIC 19 Pharisees bind heavy burdens on others

“They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger” (Matthew 23:4).

Pharisees try to appear spiritual by preaching high standards for others to follow but do not follow those standards themselves.

I remember a youth camp many years ago, at which I was one of two speakers. The other speaker preached saying that everyone must give 10% of their time to God (just like tithing money), meaning that everyone should spend 2 hours 24 minutes every day in Bible-reading and prayer. During the question time that followed, one of the young men asked me whether I agreed with this teaching. I told them that I did not agree; and then I asked the other speaker openly, “Brother, do you spend 2 hours 24 minutes everyday in Bible reading and prayer?” He sheepishly said, “No”. Everyone then saw that he was a hypocritical Pharisee who was tying heavy burdens on others that he did not lift himself. That is just one example.

There are people who urge others to give 10% of their money to God, who do not give 10% of their own gross income. They are hypocritical Pharisees. The Christian world is full of Pharisaical preachers who place impossible standards before others that they do not live up to themselves. These are the preachers who build Babylon and who destroy the work of God. They use God’s Word to burden people instead of blessing them.

I love the Message translation of Matthew 23:4 that reads thus: “Instead of giving you God’s Word as food and drink by which you can banquet on God, they package it in bundles of rules, loading you down like pack animals. They take pleasure in watching you stagger under these loads, and wouldn’t think of lifting a finger to help.”

Such preachers treat God’s children as donkeys who are to carry heavy loads. The same message from the Bible can be preached in two ways – as a burden or as a blessing. It all depends on the preacher.

It is because of Pharisaical preachers that many young people are fed up of attending church meetings. Jesus preached from the same Old Testament that the Pharisees preached from. But He liberated people with those Scriptures, whereas the Pharisees bound them with greater chains with the same Scriptures. The same thing happens when Pharisees preach today

01.23. CHARACTERISTIC 20

CHARACTERISTIC 20 Pharisees seek honour from men “The Pharisees do all their deeds to be noticed by men” (Matthew 23:5)

Jesus said that the Pharisees would pray standing in the street-corners and pray loudly (Matthew 6:1). Jesus was obviously exaggerating here – but with a purpose. He was a great master at exaggeration whenever He wanted to highlight an important point. He spoke of people having a log in their eye and of those who swallowed camels! I have also sought to follow Jesus’ example in this matter of exaggerating a point in order to drive it home. We should certainly not exaggerate when giving a report. We should not say, “200 people came to my meeting when only 150 people came”! But the type of exaggeration that Jesus used to drive home a point is very valuable.

Jesus spoke once about Pharisees who pray in order to get honour from people. Haven’t we all prayed publicly to get honour from others? We have often listened while praying, to hear if anyone would say a “Hallelujah” or an “Amen” to our prayer. This is Phariseeism, for we have then prayed to people and not to God. We need to cleanse ourselves from this sin.

Preachers can preach to get honour? I judge myself after every sermon I preach to see if I have sought to please God or man and to see where I can improve the quality of my preaching. Every cook wants to improve the quality of his cooking. But unfortunately very few preachers seek to improve the quality of their preaching. This is why most preachers are always boring to listen to. They are conceited enough to imagine that they are delivering powerful, anointed sermons. They don’t even ask their wives what they think of their preaching. Through these past many years, I have sought to improve continually in my preaching, because I want to preach in the same gripping way that Jesus preached and with the same fire and passion that He had.

There are other areas too where we are tempted to seek honour from people. You may be writing reports of your work, not to glorify God but to impress others with what you are doing for God. In our churches, from the time we started in 1975, we have never sent a report or photograph of our work to anyone, anywhere in the world. We felt it was sufficient if God knew what we were doing.

Seeking honour from people is one of the sins that are never spoken of in most churches. Seeking honour is what makes a person a Pharisee. And Pharisees will only build Babylon. To build the true church of our Lord Jesus Christ, we must cleanse ourselves from all seeking of honour from people.

01.24. CHARACTERISTIC 21

CHARACTERISTIC 21 Pharisees think that holiness is in the style of one's clothes

"The Pharisees broaden their phylacteries (small cases containing Scripture texts worn on the forehead) and lengthen the tassels of their garments" (Matthew 23:5) Another characteristic of Pharisees is to glory in the "holiness" of their clothes!!

God had told the Israelites to attach tassels (a bunch of loose threads bound at one end and hanging free at the other) to the hems of their clothes with a blue cord – to remind them every time they saw those tassels of God's commandments that came from heaven (Numbers 15:38). The Pharisees would make their tassels a little longer than those of others. They could then glory that while the tassels of others were only 3 inches long, theirs were 6 inches long – proving that they were holier!!

There are many Pharisees today too who glory in the "holy" clothes that they wear!! Someone once gave me a very colourful Hawaiian shirt. What would you think of me if you saw me wearing that shirt? It would shock some Christians. That would reveal their Phariseeism to them. We have so many ideas that are completely contrary to Christ's - because we don't meditate sufficiently on the Scriptures. We are afraid of what people will think of us if we wear a certain colour of shirt. But Jesus' holiness was not in His clothes.

Pharisees observe others carefully to see what they are wearing – clothes, shoes, earrings, etc., – in order to find something to criticise. They have eyes like an eagle for such matters.

Jesus spoke against men wearing "effeminate (malako – Greek) clothing" (Matthew 11:8). And the Holy Spirit exhorts women to dress "modestly, discreetly and simply" (1 Timothy 2:9; 1 Peter 3:3). Other than that, holiness is not found in the clothes we wear. Holiness is primarily inward.

01.25. CHARACTERISTIC 22

CHARACTERISTIC 22 Pharisees love positions and titles of honour

“ They love to sit at the head table at church dinners, basking in the most prominent positions, preening in the radiance of public flattery, receiving honorary degrees, and getting called ‘Doctor’ and ‘Reverend’. Don’t let people do that to you, put you on a pedestal like that (Matthew 23:6-8 – The Message).

Pharisees love the honour of becoming elders in a church. And Pharisaical wives of elders are also proud of the honour their husband has. If you have the tiniest bit of pride that you are an elder in a church or that your husband is an elder, you are certainly a Pharisee of the first order. Such elders can only build Babylon. There is no difference between the Pharisees of those days who loved to be called “Rabbi” and the Pharisees of today who love to be called, “Pastor, “Reverend, “Right Reverend”, “Father”, and all the other ridiculous titles that Christian leaders have taken to themselves. You can have that spirit even if you call yourself a “Brother” – but with a capital “B”. Such Pharisees love to sit on platforms at all public functions to be recognised as “Pastors”.

I got a letter some years ago from a Bible Seminary in USA offering me an honorary doctorate, because of my Internet ministry and all the books I had written. They asked me just to fill up a form and return it. I never replied. Would Jesus have been interested in getting an honorary doctorate? Certainly not. The above passage goes on to say, “Don’t let people put you on a pedestal. You all have a single Teacher, and you are all classmates. Don’t set people up as experts over your life, letting them tell you what to do. Save that authority for God; let him tell you what to do. No one else should carry the title of ‘Father’. You have only one Father, and He’s in heaven. And don’t let people maneuver you into taking charge of them. There is only one Life-Leader for you and them - Christ. Do you want to stand out? Then step down. Be a servant. If you puff yourself up, you’ll get the wind knocked out of you. But if you’re content to simply be yourself, your life will count for plenty” (Matthew 23:8-12 – The Message).

Many believers in our churches have tried to get me to take charge of their lives. They ask me to tell them what they should do. I refuse to tell them. I give them my suggestions and then tell them, “Now go and ask God first whether you should do as I say. If He doesn’t give you peace about it, then throw away my advice and do what God tells you to do. Your only leader must be Christ”.

There are many church-leaders who do not follow Christ’s teaching in this area but who love to tell people how to run their private lives. Such elders are Pharisees who are building Babylon. They are under the law themselves and they bring their flock under the law too. They do not know the freedom of the Spirit, because they love titles, position and honour.

01.26. CHARACTERISTIC 23

CHARACTERISTIC 23 Pharisees corrupt others

“Woe to you, Pharisees, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in”(Matthew 23:13)

Sincere, young people who become believers are corrupted by Pharisaical leaders. These young people may have had great zeal to overcome sin and to live for God when they were first converted. But then they see their leaders standing on big platforms like film-actors and preaching and collecting plenty of money “in Jesus’ Name” from people, and using that money to live like film-actors in their private lives. Thus these young people, who started out wanting to follow Jesus and to live like He did, now end up wanting to live like these famous preachers. And they imagine that if they are faithful, then one day they too will become famous and be able to live like film-actors. Thus these Pharisaical leaders corrupt them and hinder them from following Jesus and entering the kingdom of God.

Young people today lack good role models whom they can follow. Unfortunately, hardly any preacher today can say like Paul did, “Follow me as I follow Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1; Php 3:17). So I say to young people: Look at Jesus and follow His Example. And if you find someone who is following hard after Jesus, then look at him and follow his example as well.

01.27. CHARACTERISTIC 24

CHARACTERISTIC 24 Pharisees take advantage of poor people “Woe to you, Pharisees, because you devour widows’ houses” (Matthew 23:14)

We don’t know how exactly the Pharisees “devoured” the houses of these widows. They may have urged those poor widows to give their property for “the work of the Lord”, telling them that God would bless them for it – and then taken possession of their property and enjoyed it themselves . Thus they would “even rob the widows”, as Israel’s unjust judges had done 700 years earlier (Isaiah 10:2). This very same exploitation of poor people is going on in the 21st century too. Christian TV preachers are notorious for getting poor widows and pensioners to give them large sums of money by assuring them, “God will bless you and heal you of your sicknesses, if you give money to my ministry”. Since most old widows and pensioners have many sicknesses and other problems, TV preachers know how to exploit this for their own benefit. They use every psychological trick and many emotional appeals and verses from the Bible to squeeze money from these poor people. The poor widows believe these greedy deceivers and send their meager savings to them. The preachers then use this money to live in grand style themselves – buying private jet planes and property, etc. This pattern of swindling the poor started in America in recent times, but has now spread all over the world and is now found among many Indian preachers too. Such Pharisees are daylight robbers and thieves.

What a testimony Paul had, that he could say towards the end of his life, “We wronged no one, we corrupted no one, we took advantage of no one” (2 Corinthians 7:2). That should be the testimony of every servant of God at the end of his life.

It is evil and Satanic to take advantage of poor believers – in any way.

01.28. CHARACTERISTIC 25

CHARACTERISTIC 25 Pharisees pray long, impressive prayers in public

“Woe to you, Pharisees, because for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation” (Matthew 23:14).

I have observed through the years, that those who pray the longest in public are those who are prayerless in private. They are all Pharisees. Next time you hear a man giving a long oration in public prayer, recognise that he is a Pharisee. In a time of public praise, if the leader asks everyone to limit their praising to one or two minutes each, everyone must do that. But Pharisees will not listen or obey. They feel their prayers must be longer than that of others. The only reason for that is their arrogance, their pride and their fantastically high opinion of themselves! The Bible commands preachers to “prophesy according to the proportion of their faith” (Romans 12:6). That means that the length of our sermons should be proportionate to the maturity of our life. But 90% of the church-leaders I have met preach long, boring sermons and disobey this command every Sunday. Once again, the only reason for such disobedience is their fantastically high opinion of themselves!

01.29. CHARACTERISTIC 26

CHARACTERISTIC 26 Pharisees do missionary work and make people twofold children of hell

“Woe to you, Pharisees, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves” (Matthew 23:15)

Pharisees may be missionary-minded, but their so-called “converts” go to hell, because they do not bring their converts to genuine repentance and faith.

Pharisees may engage in a lot of “religious work” (which is fundamentally different from doing God’s will) – and even with a lot of sacrifice. They may become “full-time Christian workers”, but their converts will be double the children of hell – because they do not preach repentance and they assure people who have never turned from their sinful ways that they are born again just because they “believe”. Likewise, they convince people that they are filled with the Holy Spirit (when they are not) just because they babbled some gibberish - which is totally different from the genuine gift of tongues. Thus they make people double the children of hell. They were already living in sin, as children of hell, to begin with. But now they have been convinced by some Pharisaical preacher that they are “eternally secure”, because they repeated the “magic” words, “Lord Jesus come into my heart” – even though their attitude to sin has not changed. Now they are just told to make sure they pay their tithes regularly and a place in heaven is assured them. Thus they are insulated against the gospel. Because when they now hear a gospel message they don’t feel they need to respond to it because they are “eternally secure”. What a tremendous deception is going on today. I have told people in some of our own churches that they are not born again, even though they have been sitting in our midst for many years. Many Pharisaical elder brothers have zero discernment when it comes to assessing whether a person is born again or not. They allow all types of people to join their churches and these are the ones who cause them many problems later on.

Some Pharisaical elders are partial to the poor. They make poor people feel important in the church just because they are poor. And these elders think they are being like Jesus! (This is the opposite of those preachers who are partial towards the rich - James 2:1-4.). God knew that there could be this evil tendency among “super-spiritual elders”, and so He warned Israel’s leaders, “You shall not be partial to a poor man” (Exodus 23:3). By showing such partiality and making these poor people feel important in the church, just because of their poverty, they make these poor people twofold the children of hell. Jesus was not a Communist who came to equalize the poor with the rich. I am not a Communist either. I am a Christian. I respect people who are humble and God fearing, irrespective of whether they are rich or poor. But many church-leaders confuse Christianity with Communism.

We can deceive ourselves as a church in two ways. One is by imagining that we are a wonderful church because we have many rich, educated and cultured people in high positions in our church (but most of whom are ungodly). The other way is by imagining that we are a wonderful church

because we don't have any rich, educated people, but only a bunch of poor, uneducated people (but most of whom are ungodly)! Both churches are Babylonian –with different colours. Don't imagine that poor people are all spiritual or that rich people are all unspiritual. Poverty does not equal godliness. Don't make people twofold the children of hell.

01.30. CHARACTERISTIC 27

CHARACTERISTIC 27 Pharisees interpret Scripture without revelation from God

“Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.’ You fools and blind men! Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold? And, ‘Whoever swears by the altar, that is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering on it, he is obligated.’ You blind men, which is more important, the offering, or the altar that sanctifies the offering? Therefore, whoever swears by the altar, swears both by the altar and by everything on it. And whoever swears by the temple, swears both by the temple and by Him who dwells within it. And whoever swears by heaven, swears both by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it.” (Matthew 23:16-22). The Pharisees interpreted Scripture with their minds, without any revelation from God. So they would modify God’s Word according to their own ideas and preach that as God’s law. There are Pharisaical preachers doing that today too. They don’t understand the spirit behind God’s Word, but preach it according to the letter – and “the letter kills” (2 Corinthians 3:6). These preachers don’t see their inconsistency either, when they disobey that same word in some other area.

Here is one example. Some church-leaders teach that the wearing of jewellery is a sinful luxury and look down on any sister who may be wearing even imitation jewellery (that costs just 400 rupees). But those same preachers may have spent more than a million rupees in building their own house with many luxurious fittings in it. But they don’t see their inconsistency and hypocrisy there. They ease their conscience by saying that Scripture does not speak against the use of expensive marble flooring in a house, but only against jewellery (1 Timothy 2:9; 1 Peter 3:3)!! But Scripture actually urges us to avoid all unnecessary luxuries.

There are many other examples like this. Such church-leaders do not have the revelation of the Holy Spirit on the Word. Instead, they interpret Scripture to suit their own convenience and judge others.

01.31. CHARACTERISTIC 28

CHARACTERISTIC 28 Pharisees are sticklers for the letter of the law

“You Pharisees tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law” (Matthew 23:23).

Pharisees take some small aspect of a commandment in Scripture, and emphasise that. They “major on minors”. There is a lot of preaching like that today. Such preaching will make a church full of legalistic people who are proud of their obedience in minor matters but who are unconscious of their utter disobedience in major matters. Jesus did not tell the Pharisees not to tithe dill and cumin etc. What He did say was that the major matters in God’s Law needed more emphasis than tithing.

I studied through the four gospels once and wrote down all the subjects that Jesus emphasised: He preached on repentance, poverty of spirit, gentleness, purity, mourning for sin, paying one’s taxes, being born again, worshipping God in spirit, love, humility, marital faithfulness, breaking with human traditions, etc. But He never once spoke on how people should dress or whether women should wear jewellery or veil their heads. He did speak however on living a simple lifestyle and on not loving money.

I then studied the epistles to see what subjects were emphasised much by the Holy Spirit, and what subjects were emphasised very little, or not mentioned at all.

Thus I discovered what I should emphasise most in my preaching and what I should give less importance to. If you study Scripture like that, you will be balanced in your teaching and you will avoid becoming a Pharisaical preacher.

01.32. CHARACTERISTIC 29

CHARACTERISTIC 29 Pharisees have no justice, no mercy and no faithfulness

“You Pharisees have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done.....” (Matthew 23:23) The Pharisees were unjust and unfair in their dealings with people. They had no mercy towards those who had failed and they were not faithful in their private lives. But with all these lacks in their lives, they still considered themselves holy, because of their fastings and prayers and Bible knowledge, etc. They were like a bride going to her wedding whose bridal gown was all dirty and messy but who was only concerned that she should walk gracefully into the wedding. If there is selfishness, pride, unmerciful attitudes and unfaithfulness in our lives, then to glory in our religious activities is only to deceive ourselves that we are spiritual. We need to recognise what the weightier matters of the Christian life are – and concentrate on them first.

01.33. CHARACTERISTIC 30

CHARACTERISTIC 30 Pharisees strain out mosquitoes and swallow camels “You Pharisees, hypocrites and blind guides - who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!” (Matthew 23:24).

Pharisees are very careful in small unimportant matters (straining out dead mosquitoes). But they neglect to obey the commands in Scripture (swallowing dead camels). Jesus was not thereby telling the Pharisees that it was all right to swallow dead mosquitoes. He was showing them their inconsistency in neglecting more important matters.

Such Pharisees are careful in small matters such as wearing clean clothes when going to the church meetings, or in keeping their houses neat and tidy. These are good habits. But when it comes to more important matters such as seeking God earnestly to overcome anger and sexual lust, or helping in the practical work in the church, or travelling to the villages to bring people to Christ, they are not so keen – because these matters require the sacrifice of one’s convenience, time and money. The Message Translation paraphrases this verse thus: “Do you have any idea how silly you look, writing a life story that’s wrong from start to finish, but nitpicking over commas and semicolons?”

There are Bible Memory competitions held in Bangalore that many Christians participate in to get a prize of a few hundred rupees. To win that prize, one has to write down not only all the words of the Scripture passage accurately, but also place all the commas and the semi-colons accurately!! Some believers spend weeks and weeks memorizing the correct places for these commas and semi-colons in order to win this prize. But all the while they live in disobedience to the Scriptures in their homes. But that does not disturb them. You can win the first prize in such Bible contests and still be a Pharisee of the first order.

Love is the ultimate end and goal of the gospel (1 Timothy 1:5) – to love God with all our heart, soul and strength and to love our fellow-believers as Christ loved us. If we pursue after this love, we will know instinctively what the most important things in the Christian life are.

01.34. CHARACTERISTIC 31

CHARACTERISTIC 31 Pharisees concentrate on having a good testimony externally only

“You Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also” (Matthew 23:25-26)

Pharisees clean the outside of their lives, but do not bother about the state of their hearts, which are full of self-indulgence and greed. They live with selfish motives, thinking only of getting more and more money and honour and comfort for themselves and their families. But outwardly they are pious and religious and even active in all sorts of “ministries” that other Christians can see. Thus they get a good reputation before people.

God tests us to see whether we seek His approval or man's. One who is careless about impurity in his heart but only concerned to have a good testimony before people proves thereby that he has no fear of God at all. He is a Pharisee. People look at us on the outside, but God looks at our hearts (1 Samuel 16:7). The primary mark of a godly man is that he seeks to keep his heart clean and pure before God.

01.35. CHARACTERISTIC 32

CHARACTERISTIC 32 Pharisees say they would never have done the evil that others did

“You Pharisees build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, ‘If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’” (Matthew 23:29-30).

Pharisees look at the sins and failures of others and say, “We would never have done that. We would never dress like that. We would never have behaved like that. We would never have spoken like that”, etc.

We need to recognise, even as the best of Christians, that we have the same corrupt flesh that every child of Adam has. Pharisees do not recognise the corruption in their own flesh. A godly man would acknowledge that he is capable of committing any sin that anyone has ever committed. He will acknowledge that it is only God’s restraining grace that has kept him from committing many sins. An old saint of God, when he saw a criminal being led to his execution, said, “There, but for the grace of God, go I”. That saint recognised that he was capable of committing every crime that the criminal had committed, if it were not for the restraining power of God’s grace that he had opened his heart to receive. Every godly man will acknowledge that. But a Pharisee will never admit it.

01.36. CHARACTERISTIC 33

CHARACTERISTIC 33 Pharisees persecute God's prophets

"I am sending you prophets...Some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar" (Matthew 23:34-35).

Pharisees are offended when they hear the truth from a prophet. And so they will persecute such preachers in one way or the other. They like those preachers who flatter them, but hate those who rebuke them and correct them. The Old Testament prophets told Israel about their sin, straight to their faces – and all of them were persecuted and some of them were even killed. If you are offended by rebuke or correction from a godly man, it is very likely that you too are a Pharisee.

01.37. CHARACTERISTIC 34

CHARACTERISTIC 34 Pharisees care much for the opinions of people

“The baptism of John was from what source, from heaven or from men?” And the Pharisees began reasoning among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From men,’ we fear the people; for they all regard John as a prophet.” And answering Jesus, they said, “We do not know.” (Matthew 21:25-27). The Pharisees were always concerned what others would think about them if they took a stand on a particular matter. Their convictions were determined not by what God’s Word taught, but by what the people around them would think of them. They were not concerned about the opinions of the Romans or the Greeks. But they were concerned about the opinions of their fellow-Jews.

If you are more concerned about what people in your church think about you than to do the right thing according to your conscience, then you are a Pharisee. Many preachers do and say things in order to please some group of people in their church whose favour they desire. Many believers want their children to behave properly, not for the glory of God, but because they want honour for themselves as parents. And so they make many silly rules for their children, and make them act like “tin soldiers”. In 1987, my eldest son finished school and got admission to two colleges – to IIT in India and to a better college in the USA (with a scholarship as well). When he told me that he preferred to go to the U.S. college, I said “All right. I will send you there”. [Today, numerous young people from our churches in India have gone to the U.S.A. But in 1987, there was not even one such case in our churches. There was also a Pharisaical idea in the minds of many brothers that “spiritually-minded people in India will not go abroad or send their sons abroad – either to the Arabian Gulf or to the U.S.A.”.] My son was therefore surprised when I agreed to send him and asked me, “What will people in our churches say when they hear that you have sent your son to the United States?” But I was not going to let my children live according to the rules that Pharisees had made. I wanted them to live in freedom in Christ. So I told him, “That will only test whether I am free from the opinions of others.”

Interestingly, some who were critical of my sending my son to America, a few years later sent their own children to America. Pharisees are like that: They preach very strict rules to others, but modify those rules when it comes to their own family members. It is extremely rare to find even elder brothers who are totally free from showing partiality to their family-members.

We can lose our children to the world, if we are concerned about the opinions of others. Don’t ruin your children’s future, by listening to the foolish, legalistic rules that Pharisaical elders in your church make.

Paul said, “I have been crucified to the world, and have been set free from the stifling atmosphere of pleasing others and fitting into the little patterns that they dictate” (Galatians 6:14 -Message). Seeking to please people is like living in a room filled with a foul smell. Get out and live in the fresh air of freedom in Christ.

01.38. CHARACTERISTIC 35

CHARACTERISTIC 35 Pharisees love money “The Pharisees were lovers of money” (Luke 16:14). When we think of the Pharisees, we don’t usually associate the love of money with them. But in actual fact this is one of the clearest marks of a Pharisee. Even if you do not have any of the other 49 characteristics of a Pharisee, but have just this one, you are still a Pharisee. Pharisees will nit-pick about small rules in the Law, but when it comes to money they love it immensely. Jesus had just said (in Luke 16:13) “You cannot love God and Mammon (material wealth)”. The Pharisees scoffed at that statement (v.14), because they were lovers of money and felt that they loved God too. A believer can use material wealth as his servant (any amount of it) but the moment he begins to love it, he becomes a Pharisee.

God gave us material things to use and people to love. The devil has succeeded in reversing that in the human race and as a result people love material things and use people (for their own advantage). Jesus came to turn us right side up – so that we can love people and use material things (to bless people). Godly people deny themselves many material things so that they can bless people with those things. That’s how Jesus lived.

Many preachers who are sticklers for little rules that they impose on others are themselves great lovers of money. They even neglect their responsibilities in the church in order to make more money for themselves – because they are Pharisees and their minds are always on money.

01.39. CHARACTERISTIC 36

CHARACTERISTIC 36 Pharisees imagine that they are better than others.

“Jesus spoke this parable to some people who viewed others with contempt: Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee...who prayed to himself: `God, I thank You that I am not like other people” (Luke 18:9-11). In this parable we observe first of all that this Pharisee didn’t pray to God. He prayed to himself (v.11). He thanked God in his heart, that he was better than others. He didn’t say that aloud, for then he would have lost his reputation for humility!!

Suppose one day, someone loses his temper at you and gets angry. But you control your temper and keep quiet. Then you secretly congratulate yourself and say, “Lord, I thank You that I am not like this person. I thank You that I have self-control”. You have, at that moment, prayed the same prayer that the Pharisee prayed. That other person fell into a 10-foot pit called “anger”. But you fell into a far deeper 1000-foot pit called “spiritual pride”. Which of you was worse? That person may be convicted later of his anger and repent and come back to the Lord. But you may never see your self-righteousness – and thus never repent of your spiritual pride! Finally, in God’s eyes, that person ends up better than you.

Spiritual pride is like an onion. When you peel off one layer, you think you have finished with it. But there is another layer underneath – and another underneath that, and yet another underneath that – and so on. We will never eliminate spiritual pride completely from our lives on earth. But we can make the onion quite thin, if we judge ourselves faithfully – instead of judging others!!

Spiritual pride is also very subtle and can clothe itself in the garb of humility!! A Sunday-School teacher was teaching this story of the Pharisee and the tax-collector to her children. At the end she said (words that sounded exactly like the Pharisees’ words), “Children, thank God we are not like the Pharisee”!! We laugh at that and we say “Thank God we are not like the Sunday-School Teacher”!! Yes, spiritual pride is indeed like an onion!!

Pride and selfishness are two sins that we will never be totally free from, until Christ returns and we become like Him. These sins are like onions with innumerable layers. If we cleanse ourselves as soon as we see one layer of either of these, in us, we can gradually reduce the size of these onions. Our longing should be to make these “onions” as thin as possible, before Christ returns. If you are doing that, you are on the right track – and you will never be a Pharisee.

01.40. CHARACTERISTIC 37

CHARACTERISTIC 37 Pharisees trust in their own righteousness “He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous” (Luke 18:9).

There is a righteousness of faith, which is a gift from God. And there is a righteousness which we can produce ourselves. The way to find out which one you have is to ask yourself whether you are proud of your righteousness. If so, then you must have produced it yourself. If you had the righteousness of God which was received as a gift from Him, you would be thankful for it, but you could not be proud of it. Pharisees have a righteousness that they are proud of.

You can be proud of a book that you wrote. But you cannot be proud of a book that someone else wrote. So if you are proud of some good quality you have in your life – whether humility, or generosity, or prayerfulness, or whatever, you must have produced it yourself. If you are generous and hospitable, and you are proud of it, then those qualities may be just human qualities, and not the divine nature. Because if they were part of God’s nature that He had given you freely, how could you boast about them? To be hospitable is a good virtue, but if you are proud of it, then your hospitality stinks before God. This principle applies in other areas too – that have nothing to do with righteousness. Maybe you can sing better than others, or play an instrument better, or preach better. Or perhaps your church is larger than someone else’s church. Anything that you are proud of is the result of your own labour. If it was God’s work, you could not boast about it.

Many boast about the sacrifices they have made for the Lord. That makes it obvious that they have not seen the immensity of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross for them. Can you see a single star when the sun is shining? No. When the sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary becomes as bright as the sun in our minds, all our petty sacrifices will disappear like the stars in the daytime – and we won’t even call them “sacrifices” any more. If you can remember all your sacrifices, then you must be in the darkness still – for it is only at night that we can see the stars!!

Come in faith and humility and receive the righteousness of God that he offers you in Christ – and give Him all the glory for it, all the days of your life. Then you will never be a Pharisee.

01.41. CHARACTERISTIC 38

CHARACTERISTIC 38 Pharisees look down on others “Jesus spoke this parable to some people who viewed others with contempt” (Luke 18:9).

There are various reasons why people view others with contempt. They may have been taught by their parents from childhood to look down on others who are inferior in social status, or wealth or education etc. Or if you are very intelligent and top your class in school, you can begin to view others in your class with contempt. If, in addition, you are unfortunate enough to have foolish parents who make you imagine that you are a genius, then matters could be even worse.

Let me plead with all parents: If your children are intelligent, please don't ruin them by boasting about them. I made it a rule in my house that my sons were never to tell anyone about their rank in class or the prizes they got anywhere. I knew that if they became proud, they would lose the grace of God immediately. Then they would fall into sin and never be able to fellowship with ordinary brothers. I fear that many parents have ruined their children thus.

It is a common habit among children to make fun of someone who cannot speak English (or whatever their mother-tongue is) with a good accent. Beware of encouraging that in your home. Did any of us come out of our mother's wombs speaking with a good accent? We should thank God for any ability that we have. But we should never be proud of it. Do you know what accent they speak with in heaven? The accents of humility and love. Let us learn those accents clearly.

Perhaps you are a woman who keeps your house spotlessly clean, with everything in its proper place. Then you see someone else's home untidy and slipshod – and you despise her. You are then a Pharisee; while the person whose house is untidy may be a godly person.

Some brothers have very poor music sense and if they start singing a chorus in an open time of praise in the church, they will invariably sing totally off tune. Don't despise them, because God doesn't listen to the music. He listens to the words. And that brother singing the wrong tune may be more sincere than you are, who can sing the right tune. Personally, I have thanked God for such brothers, because they humble all the clever musicians in the church. It is Pharisee musicians who destroy the church, not the non-musical brothers. God loves non-musical brothers just as much as anyone else - but He rejects Pharisees. Many a surprise awaits such Pharisees when the Lord returns.

I am not saying that you shouldn't come first in your class, or that you shouldn't keep your house tidy, or that you shouldn't sing in tune. Not at all. By all means let us do all these. But let us be humble about them – and not despise anyone else who cannot do what we can.

There are many areas like this where we can despise others quite easily. It says in Job 36:5 that “God is almighty, but He doesn't despise anyone”. The more we become like God, the more we will value people and never despise anyone – for anything. So let us cleanse ourselves and learn to look at people as God looks at them. “What do you have that you did not receive from God?”

How can you boast then about anything or despise anyone else?" (1 Corinthians 4:7).

01.42. CHARACTERISTIC 39

CHARACTERISTIC 39 Pharisees exalt themselves over others

“This tax-collector went to his house justified rather than the Pharisee – for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled” (Luke 18:14).

Pharisees cannot be justified by God because they exalt themselves. God humbles all those who exalt themselves over others.

There are many subtle ways in which we can exalt ourselves over others. We can behave in ways that make others feel small and inferior to us. Gifted people and musicians are in great danger here. You must not play a musical instrument in a church meeting in a way that makes people admire you. You are there to help people to worship God and not to get them to worship you!!

Sometimes married couples speak about the joys of married life in the presence of single sisters who are older and not married. They are exalting their marriage relationship when they speak like that, without any consideration for the feelings of those single sisters. We must not hurt others by such testimonies. Pharisees are totally inconsiderate about the feelings of others. That is why they cannot be declared righteous (justified) by God, because God justifies only the humble.

There are many other ways in which we can exalt ourselves over others. We must ask the Holy Spirit to make us sensitive in this area.

01.43. CHARACTERISTIC 40

CHARACTERISTIC 40 Pharisees boast about their accomplishments

“God, I thank You that I am not a swindler, or unjust, or an adulterer. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.....” (Luke 18:11-12).

We face a great danger whenever we give a report of what the Lord has done through us. We must give our testimony for the glory of God – but we have to be ever so careful that we are not boasting about our accomplishments like the Pharisees did. Preachers especially are in great danger here. Many reports of Christian work that are sent by Christian workers in India to Western countries often have a spirit of boasting. Those workers are trying to prove that they are doing a great work for God – and possibly even subtly implying that they are doing a greater work than some other mission is doing in India.

There must be zero boasting about what we are doing for the Lord, if we want to be free from Phariseeism.

We must keep our work for the Lord hidden for Him alone to see. We cannot receive grace from God if there is even a smell of boasting in our lives – for God gives His grace only to the humble.

01.44. CHARACTERISTIC 41

CHARACTERISTIC 41 Pharisees accuse others

“The Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, and having set her in the center of the court, they said to Him, ‘Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act. Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?’ They were saying this, testing Him, so that they might have grounds for accusing Him” (John 8:3-6). The Pharisees had not understood the heart of God behind the law that stated that adulterous women must be stoned. God did not love to see women stoned to death, but He did want to put a severe deterrent in the way of adultery. The Pharisees were not actually interested in obeying the Law here. All they wanted was to find some grounds to accuse Jesus. They had already accused the sinful woman and now they wanted to accuse the sinless Son of God as well. That is how Pharisees are. They have no fear of God and would accuse the godliest men as much as they would accuse anyone else. The Pharisees thought this was a “Catch-22” situation, where whatever Jesus said would give them grounds to accuse Him. If He said, “Stone her to death”, they would accuse Him of lacking compassion; and if He said, “No. Don’t stone her to death”, then they could accuse Him of not keeping the Law of Moses. It was like tossing a coin and saying, “Heads we win, tails you lose”. We will win either way. But they didn’t win. They lost! Jesus did not reply immediately but sat down and waited for a word from His Father. As soon as He heard the Father’s reply, He told them, “Let him who is without sin, cast the first stone”. One sentence from the Father was enough to solve the problem.

If you listen to the Holy Spirit, you won’t have to preach a long sermon in situations like this. One sentence can shut the mouths of your enemies. God gives such words of wisdom even today to those who are not Pharisees and who do not accuse others. God’s promise to such people is “I will give you the right words and such logic and wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to reply or refute!” (Luke 21:15 – NASB and Living Bible). Was Jesus against adultery? Yes, He certainly was. But He was much more against legalism than He was against adultery. We see that very clearly here: The adulterous woman was on one side of Jesus and the legalistic Pharisees on the other. In the end we find only the adulterous woman at Jesus’ feet. The others were driven away by the word that Jesus spoke. Adultery was only a speck in the woman’s eye compared to the massive logs of legalism and hatred in the eyes of the Pharisees.

Now ask yourself how many times you have accused good brothers and sisters of things which are not even one-millionth as bad as adultery. Think of the things you have spoken about them behind their back, in your house and elsewhere. Every time you have indulged in such accusations, the log in your eye – your hard, judgemental, accusative attitude towards others – has become bigger and bigger and made you more and more blind to spiritual things. Who have you harmed ultimately? Yourself, more than anyone else. Do you think that a man with a log in his eye can be an eye-doctor to remove specks from the eyes of others? You need to hear the word of the Lord saying to you, “Leave your brothers and sisters alone. They only have a few specks in their eyes.

The log in your eye is much worse than all their specks put together.”

Why was Jesus so much against this spirit of accusation? Because, when He was in heaven, He had heard Satan (the “Accuser of the brethren”) accusing people “day and night” continually (Revelation 12:10). When Jesus came to earth and saw people having that same spirit, they reminded Him of Satan. Jesus hated this spirit of accusation then and He hates it even today. Do you realise that when you accuse others you remind Jesus of Satan? Most believers don’t see this – because the log in their eyes has blinded them.

If there is one message I have preached for 30 years it is this: If you want to progress spiritually, stop judging others and start judging yourself. Use your microscope on yourself and not on others. And after you have judged yourself, I’ll tell you what you should do. Judge yourself some more. When should you stop? When you have become completely like Jesus Christ. The apostle John told believers at the end of his life, “When Christ appears, we will be like Him...and everyone who has this hope will purify himself, just as Christ is pure” (1 John 3:2-3).

How then should a church-leader correct someone who is wrong? With mercy – with tremendous mercy, with as much mercy as the Lord has shown him. Jesus did not ignore the sin of adultery that this woman had committed. No. He first told her with great compassion, “I don’t condemn you.” Then He warned her strongly, “Don’t ever commit this sin again.” God’s grace doesn’t condone our sin! It forgives our sin first and then warns us not sin and then helps us not to sin.

Why did all the Pharisees go away? They should have come all to the Lord in brokenness saying, “Lord, please forgive me. I have got light on my own hidden sins and my hard legalistic attitude now. I see now that I am much worse than this woman. Please have mercy on me.” But not one of them came to Jesus like that.

What about you who have been finding fault with so many people for some fault or the other that you see in them? Will you let the Lord break you today? When some people have come to me and apologised for something they said or did against me, I have sensed that they were not broken. This proved that they had not really repented of their sin. They were just obeying a law to keep their conscience clean. I forgave them immediately. But I am certain that they will fall into those sins again, because they are legalistic. They had realised technically, that they had disobeyed “Law Number 347 – Thou shalt not speak evil against an elder brother behind his back” and needed now to apologize. So they go through the formality of an apology, in order to obey “Law Number 9 – Thou shalt apologize to the one thou hast wronged”!! But nothing has changed within them. They go on with their lives as before. When God gives us light on our own sins, we will be so blinded by that light, that we will fall at Jesus’ feet like a dead man (Revelation 1:17) and we will consider ourselves to be “the greatest sinners on earth” (1 Timothy 1:15). Have you ever felt like that? Or do you just feel that you slipped up slightly? Then you are a Pharisee and it cannot go well with you until you repent of stoning poor people who have specks in their eyes. Let God to break your stubborn heart.

James 2:13 reminds us that “God will be merciless in judging all who have not shown mercy to others”. And church leaders are usually the Number One culprits in this area. Parents also need to be careful that they are not unmerciful to their children. A church-leader who falls into adultery can never destroy a church, because every believer knows that adultery is a sin, and that leader will be

removed from his position immediately. But if a church-leader is a legalist, he is a far greater danger – because he is preaching “holiness”. And those who don’t have light on legalism will follow him and become legalists themselves. As a blind Pharisee he will thus lead others also into the deep pit of legalism into which he himself has fallen. Have you actually seen that your attitude of judging and accusing others is worse than if you had fallen into adultery ten times? How would you repent if you had fallen into adultery ten times in the last one month? You must repent even more than that for having the spirit of accusation.

01.45. CHARACTERISTIC 42

CHARACTERISTIC 42 Pharisees imagine that God is their Father when actually Satan is their father

Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love Me.....You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father” (John 8:42; John 8:44).

Jesus told the Pharisees to their faces that their father was the devil. Some preachers believe that no human being is a child of the devil. But Jesus stated otherwise; and He knew the truth about this better than any of us do. Those Pharisees imagined that God was their father, when in fact Satan was their father. It is the same with Pharisees today. Children manifest the nature of their father; and Pharisees are “accusers of the brothers”, like their father the devil. It is simply amazing that so many “Christians” keep on accusing and condemning other believers and yet don’t seem to realise that these are the characteristics of Satan. So he must be their father! How can such people imagine that their father is God? That is total blindness! The Pharisees in the first century didn’t believe what Jesus told them. And today’s Pharisees don’t believe it either.

I have sometimes told people who have attended our church for many years that I did not feel that they knew the Lord, despite their having repeated the words, “Lord Jesus, come into my heart” at some time in the past – because I did not see any fruit in their lives that indicated that they knew the Lord. Many church leaders are not faithful (like Jesus was) to tell people the truth. They are more interested in their own reputation than in saving people from hell. Thus the blood of those unconverted people is on the hands of such leaders.

01.46. CHARACTERISTIC 43

CHARACTERISTIC 43 Pharisees are liars and murderers

Jesus said, “You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” (John 8:44). The Pharisees had a murderous desire towards the woman caught in adultery. But today’s Pharisees have become more civilised and murder people only with their tongues. Have you murdered anyone’s reputation by spreading evil stories about him – even if the stories were true? When Satan accuses believers to God, he never tells any lies to God. He speaks the truth, because he knows that he can’t tell lies to God. He tells God the truth about your sins, but in a spirit of accusation. In the same way, it is possible to tell true stories about a believer with the spirit of the accuser in order to destroy his reputation. None of you would spread such tales about your own children. If your daughter fell into adultery, would you tell everybody in your church about it, or would you try your best to cover it up? Many of your sons and daughters have done foolish things in the past. But you parents have lovingly covered them up and protected their reputations. Why don’t you do the same when it concerns another brother’s son or daughter? We must get rid of all “murderers” from the church.

Pharisees are also liars. I have observed one thing again and again through all these years: Whenever a believer backslides, he begins to tell lies immediately. It is almost as though Satan takes over his heart and tongue immediately. They will sugar-coat their lies and pretend as if they are being honest. They will beat around the bush and talk about everything except the truth. They will not look you straight in the face when they speak. The devil is the father of lies. But he needs a mother to produce those lies through. And it is only when you give your heart to the devil that he is able to produce a lie through you. Peter asked Ananias, “Why has Satan filled your heart to tell a lie” (Acts 5:3). A preacher who tells a lie has given his tongue to Satan at that moment. He cannot then expect God to use his tongue and anoint Him to preach, until he confesses his sin and repents and forsakes that habit.

We must hate lying as much as we hate murder.

01.47. CHARACTERISTIC 44

CHARACTERISTIC 44 Pharisees persecute those who don't listen to them

"The Pharisees told him (the blind man who was healed), "You were born entirely in sins, and are you teaching us?" So they put him out (of the synagogue). (John 9:34). The Pharisees could not heal that poor man who was born blind. But when Jesus healed him, they were upset and called him a sinner and put him out of the synagogue.

Pharisaical church-leaders threaten to put people out of the church if they won't obey the leader's orders. Pharisaical elders love to have authority over others and to control them. Jesus said that if a brother sins, we should go and speak to him and try and win him. (Matthew 18:15). Excommunication should be the last option. Our goal must always be to try and win the brother who sinned.

Believers may fall into sin and do wrong things. When that happens, his church-leader has an option: To speak to him as Jesus would, or as a Pharisee would. Jesus would seek to win the brother. But the devil will want to destroy him. Pharisees are in league with the devil and will harass and persecute those who do not listen to them, or who do not submit to their authority.

01.48. CHARACTERISTIC 45

CHARACTERISTIC 45 Pharisees are jealous of those who can do miracles that they cannot do

“The Pharisees said, ‘What are we doing? For this man is performing many miracles’. From that day on they planned together to kill Him” (John 11:47; John 11:53).

Here, in John 11:1-57, Jesus had just raised Lazarus from the dead. The Pharisees should have been excited about it. But they were not - because the Man who did the miracle was not from their group!! Jesus belonged to another denomination!! The Pharisees were green with jealousy over this. Jealousy is such an obvious thing, that even a worldly person like Pilate could recognise it in the Pharisees (Matthew 27:18). Beware of jealousy.

Pharisees are jealous of those who do miracles. I am not talking now about the counterfeit “miracles” being done by television evangelists today that fool many believers. We have all seen plenty of those. I am talking about real miracles that are taking place even today. But you don’t see those on television or at the so-called “healing crusades”. The real miracles taking place today (exactly as in the Acts of the Apostles) are in places where the gospel is being preached for the very first time – for example, in some places in North India. Many don’t realise the fact that in the Acts of the Apostles, the miracles God performed were in places where the gospel was going for the first time. The people through whom God is doing such miracles today are ordinary, unknown believers; and just like Jesus, they also do not advertise the miracles they have seen.

God is a God of miracles, and if you cannot trust Him to do a miracle for you, then you are a Pharisee. When you are sick you must pray to God for healing, and not just accept the sickness. We have some privileges as God’s children that others do not have. We can “taste the powers of the age to come” (Hebrews 6:5). And if it is not God’s will to heal you (for any reason), then you can ask Him to give you “something better than healing”, as He gave Paul (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). If you are an elder in a church and some sick person comes to you for prayer, you must pray (with whatever faith you have) that God will heal him and draw him closer to Himself thereby. And when God answers your prayer, be careful to give Him the glory and not to boast about it – or else you will end up as a greater Pharisee.

01.49. CHARACTERISTIC 46

CHARACTERISTIC 46 Pharisees judge godly people for not doing something that they do “The Pharisees said, ‘This man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath” (John 9:16).

Pharisees assess people not by their godliness but by whether they observe some religious ritual or not. They were certain that Jesus could not be from God, because He did not keep the Sabbath the way they kept it. We too can have our own ideas as to how something should be done in the church; and if someone does not do it that way, we can write him off as ungodly. Prejudice is a powerful evil that can destroy fellowship. The Salvation Army (founded by William Booth in the 19th century in England) does not have “breaking of bread” in their services. One reason they gave for that was that many of their converts were drunkards and were tempted to go back to their alcoholism, when they smelt the wine at the communion. They did not practise water-baptism either, because they said that many who were baptized had not really been converted. But William Booth was one of the godliest men of his time; and he and his wife brought thousands to Christ from the dregs of society, all over the world. What would you think of such a man? Pharisees would reject him outright. But if I were living in England 150 years ago, I would have joined him in the work he was doing of bringing drunkards and prostitutes and thieves to Christ – a work that no-one else was doing. I don’t agree with their doctrines in these two matters. But I would not assess a man’s godliness by whether he agreed with me on baptism and the Lord’s Table.

We have to be careful that we don’t speak empty words of criticism against godly men like William Booth. It is true that Paul criticised Peter for a compromising stand that Peter took (Galatians 2:11). But Peter had recognised the grace that God had given Paul (Galatians 2:9). So when such a man as Paul criticises Peter, that is acceptable. But who are the ones who are criticising godly men today? Invariably, those who have done nothing for the Lord themselves, and those whom God has not borne witness to in any way. Such foolish believers dare to criticise godly men whom God has used a thousand times more than them. That is Phariseeism.

01.50. CHARACTERISTIC 47

CHARACTERISTIC 47 Pharisees test God by asking Him for signs “The Pharisees said to Jesus, ‘Teacher, we want to see a sign from You’” (Matthew 12:38).

Pharisees always want some sign or miracle to be assured of the truth. They cannot live by simple faith. And that is why religious charlatans are able to deceive such Pharisees with their false signs and wonders today. Don’t ever imagine that asking God for a sign or a miracle is a mark of spirituality. It’s the mark of a Pharisee. We find this statement repeated in Matthew 16:1 as well.

01.51. CHARACTERISTIC 48

CHARACTERISTIC 48 Pharisees have no concern for lost sinners “The Pharisees said, ‘This crowd which does not know the Law is accursed’” (John 7:49)

Today’s Pharisees can have the same attitude towards those going to hell and say, “O these people who don’t accept Christ as their Saviour are going to hell.” That is true. But such a comment also exposes the speaker as a Pharisee who has no concern for the lost. If you have no concern for those who are going to hell, that would clearly prove that you are a Pharisee. When we witness to others, our concern should be their salvation and not that their blood should no longer be on our hands. I have seen Christians distributing tracts indiscriminately to people and sticking tracts in people’s letter boxes and cars, and then being satisfied that they have done their part. “God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved” (John 3:17). But a lot of the tract-distribution being done today by many believers only results in condemning those unbelievers. It is done with the selfish motive of easing the believers’ conscience and not with love and a burden to bring those lost people to the Saviour’s feet. Many of these tract-distributors imagine that they have a concern for the lost. But they don’t. They are Pharisees.

01.52. CHARACTERISTIC 49

CHARACTERISTIC 49 Pharisees value their traditions more than God's Word

"Jesus said to the Pharisees, 'You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition'" (Mark 7:9).

All churches have traditions of some sort or the other. If those traditions have become more important to you than God's Word, then you are a Pharisee. Jesus told the Pharisees that by exalting their traditions above God's Word, they had progressively (1) "neglected the Word of God", (2) "set it aside" and finally (3) "invalidated it" altogether (Mark 7:8-13).

We all need to ask ourselves whether any of us have been guilty of the same sin. Are your traditions more important to you than loving God with all your heart and loving your fellow-believers (in every denomination) exactly as Jesus loved you? Do you reject a child of God just because he does not keep your church-traditions? If so, you are a Pharisee.

01.53. CHARACTERISTIC 50

CHARACTERISTIC 50 Pharisees justify themselves

“Jesus said to the Pharisees, ‘You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God’” (Luke 16:15). A Pharisee justifies himself in every situation. He cannot humbly acknowledge his error and take the blame for his sins and his mistakes.

Adam could not take the blame for his sin. When God asked him “Did you eat of the tree?” there was only one answer that was right: “Yes Lord”. But he didn’t say that. He first blamed his wife for giving him the fruit and then blamed God for giving him such a wife!! (Genesis 3:12). This is what is meant by justifying oneself. As a result Adam was driven out of paradise. The thief on the cross who was saved was totally different. He said, “I deserve my punishment.” (Luke 23:41). He did not blame his parents for bringing him up badly, or his friends for leading him astray, or the judge for being prejudiced or partial or too hard. He simply said, “I am totally deserving of this punishment.” As a result, he went with Jesus to paradise that very day – for paradise is made for those who accept the blame for their own sins and who don’t blame anyone else.

If you are one who blames your wife or God or any other person, in order to justify yourself, you are a Pharisee and you are on your way to hell.

Jesus’ closing words to the Pharisees are fearful: “You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell?” (Matthew 23:33).

“Since we have a kingdom that nothing can destroy, let us please God by serving Him with thankful hearts and with holy fear and awe. For our God is a consuming fire. So continue to love each other with true brotherly love” (Hebrews 12:28-29; Hebrews 13:1).

Phariseeism is like the pus inside an infected boil on your skin. As you squeeze out the pus each day, you will find more and more pus there until it is completely cleansed. So we must squeeze out all the Phariseeism within us, until nothing is left. May we honestly acknowledge, “Lord, I am the guilty person. It’s not my husband, or my wife, or my brother, or my sister, or anyone else, who is a Pharisee. It is me. Please have mercy on me and deliver me completely from my Phariseeism. Give me grace to be a godly man and a disciple of Yours. And help me to be merciful to others at all times, just as You have been merciful to me.” May the Lord help us walk this way all the days of our life, so that we can have an abundant entrance into His kingdom one day.

Amen and Amen.

02.0.1. A Spiritual Leader

A Spiritual Leader by
Zac Poonen

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02.0.4. ABOUT THIS BOOK

ABOUT THIS BOOK Spiritual leadership is the need of the hour in the churches in India. This book contains a series of messages that were given to a group of Christian workers, Bible-college lecturers and pastors of churches. The messages have been reproduced in their spoken form, for easy reading. May the Lord speak to your heart through this book and challenge you to be a role-model for today's younger generation - as an exemplary servant of God and a truly spiritual leader.

Zac Poonen

October, 1999

02.01. CHAPTER 01 CALLED BY GOD

CHAPTER 1 CALLED BY GOD A spiritual leader will first and foremost, have a calling from God. His work will not be his profession, but his calling.

No-one can appoint himself as a spiritual leader. "He has to be called by God for this work" (Hebrews 5:4 -Living). This is a principle that cannot be changed. The next verse goes on to say that even Jesus did not appoint Himself as our High Priest. The Father appointed Him. If that be the case, how much more this should be true of us, in our calling. The tragedy today is that the vast majority of "Christian workers" in India are working to earn their living. It is a profession for them. They have not been called by God.

There is a lot of difference between "a profession" and "a calling". Let me explain what I mean. Suppose there's a sick child in a hospital and a nurse looks after it for 8 hours on her shift-duty. That nurse then goes home and forgets all about that child. Her concern for that child was only for 8 hours. Now she has other things to do, such as going to the movies and watching television. She doesn't have to think about that child again until the next day when she goes back to work. But the mother of that child doesn't work 8-hour shifts! She can't go to the movies when her child is sick. That's the difference between a profession and a calling.

If you apply that illustration to the way you care for the believers in your church, you'll discover whether you're a nurse or a mother!

Paul said, in 1 Thessalonians 2:7, "We proved to be gentle among you as a mother tenderly cares for her own children. Having thus a fond affection for you, we were well pleased to impart you not only the gospel but also our own lives because you've become very dear to us".

Paul not only imparted the gospel of God to those Christians but his life as well. Any ministry that is not done in this way is not really Christian ministry. Paul served God like that because he had a calling to the ministry. He didn't take it up as a profession.

It's wonderful to serve the Lord. It is the greatest thing in the world. Nothing on earth can be compared with it - but only if you're called. It cannot be reduced to a profession.

God called me to serve Him (full-time) on May 6, 1964 when I was an officer in the Indian Navy. I handed in my resignation then to the naval authorities. But it was like Moses asking Pharaoh to let the Israelites go! The Indian Navy wouldn't release me. It took two years and repeated applications before they finally released me - miraculously - in God's perfect time. Being called of God has made all the difference in my life.

First of all, it doesn't matter to me now, what people think about me or my ministry, because Someone Else is my Master and I have to answer only to Him.

Secondly, I can trust God to stand by me and give me grace whenever I face any trial or opposition in my ministry - and that happens often.

Thirdly, it doesn't matter to me whether I receive any money or not, and whether I get any food to eat or not. If I receive food and money, well and good. If I don't get any food or money, that's fine with me too. I cannot stop serving the Lord, just because I didn't get money or food - because God has called me.

I can't get rid of my calling. I'm not a salaried employee who can stop working when I'm not paid or fed! It's like the case of the mother and her child. A nurse will stop working if her salary is not paid one month. But a mother can never stop. She doesn't get a salary in any case! And she'll look after her baby even if she doesn't get any food or money! That's how the apostles served the Lord.

What a glorious thing it is to be called of God!

You can never do the Lord's work, the way God wants you to do it, if you do it as a profession. It has to be a calling or nothing. Every other job in the world can be done as a profession. But not a mother's, or a father's, or that of a servant of the Lord! All these are the result of a calling. Paul told the Corinthian Christians that even if they had 10,000 teachers, they still had only one father (

1 Corinthians 4:15). Paul was both a spiritual father and a mother to his flock. His was not a profession but a calling.

"Take this child and nurse him for me and I shall give you your wages" is what the Lord has said to me (Exodus 2:9). He said that to me first of all concerning my own physical children. And then He said that to me concerning my spiritual children too. When we take care of God's children He's the One Who is responsible to give us our wages, not man. If we serve men, then let us look to men to pay us. But if we serve the Lord, then let us look to Him alone to provide us our needs, in whatever way He sees fit. And let Him also decide how much we should receive each month. There is a dignity about a true servant of the Lord. But it is possible that you as an elder feel no such sense of responsibility for the people in your church. You may content yourself with teaching the Bible every Sunday. But you may get a surprise when Jesus comes again and evaluates your ministry and you discover that your entire earthly ministry was only wood, hay and straw, fit only for being burnt (1 Corinthians 3:12-13). Think of the tragedy that will be! If you take this warning seriously now, it could reduce your regret at the judgment seat of Christ.

All of us are going to have some degree of regret when Christ comes again, concerning the way we lived and served the Lord. But we can reduce that regret by examining our ways and judging ourselves now. We must evaluate our ministry and see how it will look in the light of that day.

"Take these children and nurse them for Me", says the Lord, "Bring them up for me and I will give you your wages". Those wages will not be in terms of money, primarily. I believe the Lord takes care of our earthly needs, since He taught us to pray for our daily bread and He has ordained that those who preach the gospel should live of the gospel. So He will take care of all our earthly needs. But there'll be a far greater spiritual reward, in addition.

Paul wrote to the Christians at Thessalonica that they were going to be his crown and his joy when the Lord returned (1 Thessalonians 2:19). He found his delight in them, just as a father finds his delight in his children. An elder (who is a spiritual father) will be delighted when he sees that believers, who came as raw material to his church once, have now become men of God. This is something akin to the delight a sculptor has when he has fashioned a shapeless rock into a human

form. He had to chip away at that block for many months and years before the face and figure of the man came out of it! That is the work that God has given us to do too. We must never be satisfied with merely having instructed people correctly. If the image of Christ has not come forth in their lives, we have accomplished nothing at all. An earthly father is also delighted when his children can stand on their own feet. He doesn't want them to be perpetually dependent on him. A true spiritual father will be like that too. He'll make himself dispensable - less and less needed by his spiritual children as they grow and mature.

Consider a home where there are 12 children. You may wonder how any mother can manage twelve children, when your wife finds it difficult with even two! But amazingly, in the long run, the mother of twelve has less work to do than the mother of two! That's because the mother of 12 trains her older children to help her in the home. Ultimately the children do all the work and the mother is totally free! This is what we must do as shepherds in our churches too - delegate. But what do we see in most churches? Overburdened pastors are becoming nervous wrecks because they have to do everything themselves. (That mother of 12 would become a nervous wreck too, if she had to take care of all her children herself.) Many churches are like orphanages where hundreds of babies lie on the floor, kicking their legs, wailing and holding on to their feeding-bottles. This is the result of a one-man ministry. The believers never grow up, because they are never given any responsibility. In the Body of Christ, each member has a task to fulfil.

Jesus disciplined only twelve people and I don't think any man can handle more than that number effectively, at a time. So by that reckoning, a church of 120 people should have at least ten pastors taking care of the flock. By "pastors", I do not mean full-time workers, but brothers working in a secular job, who have been gifted with a shepherd's heart to care for the sheep and encourage them. The harvest is plenteous today. But the true shepherds are few. If you serve the Lord, let it be because God has called you to serve Him, and not because you want to earn a living, or for the sake of man's honour!

02.02. CHAPTER 02 KNOWING GOD

CHAPTER 2 KNOWING GOD A spiritual leader will be able to lead others along God's ways because He knows God personally.

Daniel 11:32-33 speaks of two types of preachers who will be found on earth in the last days. There will be many who speak smooth words and turn people to ungodliness. On the other hand, there will be a few who know God, who give people insight and do great exploits for God.

Today, both these types of preachers are found in Christendom. There are many who speak smooth words to please their hearers. But those who know God speak the truth, whether their hearers are pleased or offended, and whether men shower them with praises or abuses!

Human beings are like sheep. They tend to follow the crowd and are afraid of being different. But if the crowd is going in the wrong direction, everybody goes astray. This is the situation today. So, God is looking for some, who will stand true to Him and lead people along His way. But if we are to be bold enough to be different from the crowd, we must know God and His mind - His thoughts and His ways.

Most Christian "leaders" whom I've met in India during the last 30 years, do not seem to know God personally, or His thoughts. They simply repeat what they've read in some Western Christian magazine or book. Some particular emphasis is popular in every decade among American Christian leaders. In the 1980s it was one thing and today it is something else. And like the echoes that one hears in mountainous regions, these emphases are faithfully echoed by their sycophants in India and other Third-World countries – especially when they present their "papers" at congresses on evangelism! If the American "leaders" write about "church growth", then the Indian Christian "leaders" faithfully echo "church growth". If the Americans speak about "the 10/40 window", then the Indian preachers faithfully repeat "the 10/40 window". If Western Christians teach "the pre-tribulation rapture of the church", then Indian Bible-teachers will teach only that. They never dare to question Western Christians! But doesn't God ever speak to anybody in India directly? Does He speak only to the white races? The reason for all this imitation is the slave-mentality that is found among almost all Third-World Christians. We Indians were ruled by the British for more than 200 years. And it is difficult for us to be free from this "slave-mentality". Almost all Indian Christians feel that the white man is superior to them and more spiritual than them - because he is assertive and domineering and has lots of money.

I met a black American brother once who told me that although the black people in U.S.A. had been legally delivered from slavery more than a century ago, the spirit of the slave was still found in most of them even now! When they look at a white man, they feel inferior to him. I find exactly the same attitude in almost every Indian Christian. To tell you quite honestly, I've found most Western preachers who've come to India (that I've met) to be quite shallow and worldly. They don't know God. But because they have plenty of money to throw around, they become celebrities wherever they go. Look at the advertisements for Christian conferences in India. In the vast

majority of cases, the main speaker is always a Western preacher. What a sad state our country's Christianity has come to? If this were true only among nominal Christians, one could understand it. But it is just the same among those who claim to be "born again" and "Spirit-baptized"!

We must break free from this slave-mentality. But if some white man is paying your salary, then of course it will be difficult for you to break free from him! Then you must decide to stop serving men and start serving the Lord. Whose servant are you in any case? The Bible tells us not to be slaves of men, because we have been bought with a price (1 Corinthians 7:23).

Let your passion be to know God personally. Then you won't be an "echo" of some Western "leader" - or of an Indian "leader" for that matter! You won't be anyone's slave. You'll be a man of God. Spiritual authority can come only through a personal knowledge of God.

I urge you my brothers, be men who know God. That will make your personal life glorious and your ministry authoritative. This is what our country needs today more than anything else.

It is much easier to know the Bible than it is to know God - because you don't have to pay a price to know the Bible. All you have to do is study.

You can be immoral in your personal life and impure in your thought-life and still know the Bible very well. You can be a well-known preacher and yet be a great lover of money at the same time. But you can't know God and be immoral in your life. You can't know God and be a lover of money. That's impossible. And that's why most preachers take the easier path of knowing the Bible rather than knowing God.

I want to ask you, brothers: Are you happy with just knowing the Bible or is there a desperate hunger in your hearts to know the Lord? The apostle Paul said in Php 3:8-10 that his greatest longing was to know the Lord better. He considered everything else as rubbish compared to knowing the Lord. Paul gave up all his pearls for this pearl of great price. The secret of Paul's ministry is to be found not in the years that he spent studying the Bible at Gamaliel's seminary, but in his personal knowledge of the Lord.

"Eternal life is to know God and Jesus Christ personally" (John 17:3). We have perhaps defined eternal life as living eternally in heaven. But that was not how Jesus defined it. Eternal life has nothing to do with going to heaven or escaping hell. It has to do with knowing the Lord. To know God intimately and personally has been the passion of my life and the burden of my heart. I know that my ministry can have Divine authority only as I know God personally. And so, in all of our churches, I have sought to lead people to a knowledge of God Himself.

There is more Bible knowledge today than ever before in history. For nearly 1500 years after the day of Pentecost, there were no printed Bibles available anywhere. Only in the last two centuries, have Bibles been so freely available. Today, we have so many versions and concordances and study-helps. But do you think all this increased Bible knowledge has produced holier Christians? No. If Bible-knowledge could produce holiness, we should be having the godliest people in history living today. But we don't. Satan himself would have been holy if Bible-knowledge could produce holiness - for no-one knows the Bible as well as he does.

We have so many seminaries today teaching the Bible to thousands of students. But are the godliest people in the world today found in those seminaries? No. Many seminary graduates today

are worse than the heathen.

Some years ago, I met a seminary graduate from one of India's top evangelical seminaries, who had stood first in his graduating class. He told me that after three years in that seminary, his spiritual condition was worse than when he first joined it. What then did that seminary teach him? It had taught him facts about the Bible and about Christianity. Satan himself could have graduated as first in the class, from such a seminary.

What was the use that young man learning Hermeneutics, and what the "higher critics" had said, and what the root-meanings of Greek words were, if he hadn't overcome anger, bitterness, lustful thoughts and the love of money? With his newly-acquired certificate, he would soon become a pastor of a church. But what would he teach the people in his church, whose biggest problems would be moral and not theological? He wouldn't be able to help them at all, in any of those areas. This is how God's work in India is being destroyed.

Only if you know God yourself, will you be able to lead your flock to know Him. If you have victory over sin in your own life, you'll be able to lead your flock also to victory over sin. Then they too will be equipped to go out and serve the Lord - with authority and power. Do you think the devil is impressed by anyone's Bible knowledge or degree-certificates? Not at all. Satan fears only holy, humble men and women who know God. May God help us to lead our younger brothers and sisters to know God.

02.03. CHAPTER 03 FEARING GOD

CHAPTER 3 FEARING GOD A spiritual leader will fear God greatly. The more we get to know God the more we will fear Him. We won't be afraid of God, but we will reverence Him. In Psalms 34:11, David says, "Come you children listen to me, and I'll teach you the fear of the Lord."

It's not an easy task to teach people the fear of God. It's far easier to teach them how to analyse Romans and Ephesians!

If we are to teach others to fear God, we must fear Him ourselves first. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. A man who fears God can teach his flock far more than a man who merely knows the Bible. Those who do not fear God can only communicate knowledge, not wisdom. Knowledge makes a man proud - as we read in 1 Corinthians 8:1. But wisdom makes a man mature and teaches him how to apply his knowledge to the problems of daily life. Only men with wisdom can build the church of Jesus Christ. The fear of the Lord is the ABC of the Christian life. If you haven't taught your flock the fear of the Lord first, then however much you may have taught them other subjects, you've failed in your primary task. You would then be like a teacher who tries to teach his students geography and history before they can even read! No teacher in the world makes that mistake. To learn the fear of the Lord is like learning how to read. But most elders in churches don't teach their flock the fear of the Lord first. Here is the proof that the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light.

Let me ask a question of those of you who have graduated from a seminary. Did you learn the fear of the Lord there, or did you merely get a degree-certificate?

Let me ask you a second question: Why did you join that seminary? Was it to get a job or was it to learn the fear of God? Why did you choose one seminary in preference to another? Was it because it was a more prestigious one? And did you join it even though you knew it was not evangelical in doctrine but liberal? Can you imagine Jesus sending His disciples to such seminaries to prepare them for His service? How many of you can honestly say that you chose a seminary to learn the fear of God? Probably none. Isn't that tragic?

I know that many people join a Bible school here in India only as a first step to go to the United States, to make money. Some apply to Bible-schools in America in order to settle down there. How can such people ever serve the Lord? Can you acknowledge today that you joined a Bible-school with wrong motives? If you're willing to be honest, then there's great hope for you - for God loves honest people. Now, make sure you warn others not to repeat your mistake. Teach them the fear of the Lord first. Our children don't have to repeat the mistakes we've made. In Proverbs 24:3-4, we're told that a house is built by wisdom and that by knowledge its rooms are filled with many precious things. Notice the contrast here between wisdom and knowledge. I'm not devaluing Bible-knowledge. Not at all. I've spent more than 40 years studying the Bible and I think I know it as well as anyone else. But what I seek for most of all is wisdom. Divine love is the greatest thing in the world. But Divine love is always guided by Divine wisdom. Love without wisdom is

dangerous.

Love can be likened to the petrol in the tank of a bus, and Wisdom to the driver of the bus. You certainly need love to lead your flock forward. But you need wisdom to decide which way you're going to lead them.

Wisdom is fundamental. It is possible for you to get 100% in Bible-knowledge and zero for wisdom! That would be like a student getting 100% in Physical Training and zero in mathematics. It would be better if he got 100% in maths and zero in Physical Training, because in the long run, maths is more important than P.T. And in the long run, wisdom is more important than knowledge.

We saw that knowledge fills the rooms. Knowledge is like the furniture – chairs, tables and beds - that we put into our rooms. So if you have knowledge without wisdom, you'd be like a man who puts out all his expensive furniture on an empty plot of ground! Many expensive tables and sofas are there. The only thing missing is the house! You can well imagine that such a man will be the laughing stock of everyone around him. But that's exactly what we see among most leaders and preachers in Christendom today. They have knowledge but no wisdom – because they do not fear God.

We hardly hear any preacher preaching these days about the fear of the Lord. And that's why most believers are not wise and have so many other fears.

02.04. CHAPTER 04 LISTENING TO GOD

CHAPTER 4 LISTENING TO GOD A spiritual leader will take time to listen to God, every day. A phrase that occurs frequently in the very first chapter of the Bible is this: "Then God said".

God said something on every one of those first six days, when He remade the chaotic earth. And each time God spoke, the earth became a better place.

So, right there on the very first page of the Bible we learn one very important truth - that we must hear what God has to say every day. And if we submit to what God tells us every day, we will be transformed into better and more useful Christians.

There's a lot of difference between hearing what God has to say to us and just reading the Bible. Remember, it was people who studied their Bibles daily who crucified the Lord. They studied their Bibles but they never heard God speaking to their hearts (See Acts 13:27). That's the danger we face too. And then, we can be as blind as they were.

Genesis 1:1-31 also teaches us that God wants to speak to us every day. But most Christian leaders don't listen to God every day. They only read the writings of men!

It's a great tragedy if you preach only what you've heard other men speak, because the word of man can never produce anything eternal. It's only the Word that God speaks that can produce eternal fruit - as we read in Isaiah 55:11. In Genesis 1:1-31, we read that whenever God spoke, supernatural things happened. That's how it can be in our ministry too, if we preach what God has first spoken to our own hearts.

Paul told Timothy to take heed to his own life first before his teaching, if he wanted to save himself and others (1 Timothy 4:16). The only way to escape self-deception is by hearing what God has to say to us.

If you don't listen to what God has to say, then you'll preach in one of the following three ways:

1. You'll find out what the so-called "great Christian preachers" in the world are saying at this time - especially in America, where most of the money for Christian work in India comes from! (I say "so-called great preachers", because these preachers are not "great" in God's eyes). You'll read their books and repeat what they say. Once you discover that a particular subject is popular in Christendom currently, you'll decide to speak much about that. Your undiscerning flock will be impressed and will consider you well read and spiritually-minded! OR

2. You'll study Biblical themes academically and teach them like a college lecturer studies and teaches Chemistry! And one can get a doctorate in Biblical studies far more easily than a doctorate in Chemistry! Many honorary "doctorates" are being given away today by third rate Bible-colleges to "title-hungry" preachers and pastors for a few hundred rupees each! You can get as many as you like! But even if you get an earned doctorate in theology, that will still prove only that you're a clever man. You may still not know either God or His Word. OR

3. You'll try and sense what is most acceptable to your flock – because you want to be popular with them. You'll then be like businessmen who conduct market surveys to find out what most people want. This is how most pastors preach today. And that was how all the false prophets in the Old Testament preached too - and they flourished! Every false prophet would try to sense what the nation of Israel wanted to hear and they would preach just that. So they were popular with the people and made a lot of money. There are many such false prophets in Christendom today. But every true prophet in Israel was unpopular, because they told the Jews what they NEEDED to hear, and not what they wanted to hear.

Jesus once rebuked Martha for being busy with so much work instead of being like Mary who sat and listened to Him speak. Our Lord went on to say that what Mary did was the ONLY necessary thing in life (Luke 10:42). We must all have the attitude that Samuel had, who said, "Speak Lord, your servant is listening".

What did we see in the very first page of the Bible? Whenever God spoke, something was immediately accomplished: Light was produced, the earth came up out of the waters, trees, fish and animals were created, etc.,

Isaiah 55:10-11 tells us that the Word which goes forth from God's mouth will never return empty without accomplishing what God desires and without succeeding in the matter for which it was spoken.

Notice two words in these verses that are highly valued by all people in the world - "accomplishment" and "success".

We all want to accomplish something in our lives and we all want to succeed. But life is short and we don't have the time to experiment with various methods for success and accomplishment - certainly not in spiritual matters. We shouldn't try out some method of doing the Lord's work and discover 20 years later that that was not God's way of doing things, and that we were on the wrong track! We can be saved from all such wastage of time, if we listen to the word that God speaks. That will always bring success and accomplishment.

I want to listen to a man who listens to God – because such a man can teach me more in five minutes than theologians (with long 'tails' of degrees), can teach me in hours. John the Baptist could teach people more about God than Professor Gamaliel or any member of the Jewish Sanhedrin! When you listen to God, you won't preach what you've read in Christian books and magazines or heard from Christian tapes. The man who hears God speaks from revelation, not from academic knowledge or study. Such a man first experiences what he reads - and then speaks forth from his life.

What you teach from your head will go only into other people's heads. But what you preach from your heart and from your life's experience will go straight into their hearts and change their lives. I'm not saying that you shouldn't prepare your messages or that you shouldn't have written notes when speaking. Whether you use notes or not depends on how good a memory you have, not on how spiritual you are. What I'm saying is that whatever you speak must be from your heart and from your life.

Today we have liberal theological colleges and evangelical theological colleges. But what's the difference between the two? In one, the information transmitted from one brain to another is theologically incorrect whereas in the other, the information transmitted is theologically correct! But spiritually speaking, the evangelical seminary may be no better than the liberal one. In both seminaries, the lecturers and the students may be lovers of money and slaves to their lusts.

Jesus did not teach His disciples like that. He did not come to make us better informed about theology. He came to make us like Him in character.

Jesus taught His disciples more about character than about theology. What about you? Do you teach your flock how to overcome the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life?

There are a lot of people in our churches who look up to us to hear what God is saying to them. It's a solemn responsibility to preach to them, Sunday after Sunday. If I were you, I would fear, because we are accountable to God for what we tell them. We have to give an account to God one day, for every message we ever preached - for what we spoke, why we spoke it, and how we spoke. If you take your responsibility in this matter seriously, your ministry can change radically. For over twenty years now, I've judged my own ministry in the Lord's light. After I preach God's Word, I ask the Lord to tell me whether there was something unnecessary in what I said, whether I wasted people's time, whether I sought my own honour, etc., Thus I've cleansed myself gradually from these evils and from boring people and preaching "over their heads". Do you listen to God, after you've preached a message? Do you ask Him to show you whether you could have done it better? The fact that others considered it to be a good sermon means nothing at all. What did God think of it? That is the important question.

Many of you have so many people listening to you, in your churches, Sunday after Sunday. Are you influencing their lives for eternity? Have you changed their sense of values so that they are no longer worldly but heavenly? This is what you must ask yourself frequently.

We must be especially careful to listen to God, when we have some important decision to make.

God speaks to us through many ways.

He speaks to us primarily through His Word. If something is clearly written in God's Word, then we don't need to pray to find God's will, because it has already been revealed.

God also speaks to us through our circumstances. Our Lord has the key to every door (Revelation 1:18) and when He opens a door no-one can shut it and when He shuts a door, no-one can open it (Revelation 3:8). So our circumstances are very often an indication of whether God wants us to go along a particular way or not. We don't have to bang away at a door that God has not opened. We must of course pray, when we see a door shut. But if after repeated prayer, a door still remains shut, it may mean that God does not want us to go through that door. We must ask God to show us if this is so, or whether He wants us to continue in persistent prayer to open that door (Luke 11:5-9).

God also speaks to us through the advice of mature, godly brothers. Such men have gone through many experiences and they can warn us of pitfalls that we are unaware of, ourselves. We don't have to blindly obey them, but their godly counsel can help us.

God often speaks to us, while we are fellowshiping with other believers. Thus He teaches us our dependence on other members of the Body of Christ, even for revelation on His Word.

God always has something important to say to us, whenever we go through a trial or when we are sick.

God also warns us through the failures of others. If, for example, we hear of some servant of God who has fallen into sin, it is good to ask God what lessons we can learn from that man's failure (for we are all weak) and how we can preserve ourselves.

God can also speak to us when we hear news of evils being done somewhere or of accidents that have taken place. Jesus told the people of His time to repent, when they heard of Pilate butchering some Jews and when they heard of the accident in Siloam where a tower fell and killed some people – because such things could happen to anyone (Luke 13:1-4).

Let me add a word of warning however, against trying to hear what God is saying, by randomly opening the Bible and reading the first verse that you see!

If you're eager to marry a particular girl, you may open the Bible at random to find some confirmatory verse. And if you don't find it, the chances are that you will keep opening the Bible until you find the verse that you want! That's how you can deceive yourself.

I heard a story of a man who was trying to find God's will in this way, who opened the Bible at random and read, "He went away and hanged himself" (Matthew 27:5)! He opened the Bible again and found, "Go and do the same" (Luke 10:37)! He opened the Bible a third time and read, "What you do, do quickly" (John 13:27)! That cured him forever of trying to find the will of God in this way!

There may be times however, when we are under pressure, when the Lord may encourage us through a verse that we get, by opening the Bible at random. So this method is all right if you're looking for encouragement but not if you're looking for guidance.

I want to encourage you, dear brothers, to develop the habit of listening to God. This is the single most important habit that you can ever develop.

02.05. CHAPTER 05 BALANCED BY THE BODY OF CHRIST

CHAPTER 5 BALANCED BY THE BODY OF CHRIST A spiritual leader will recognise that his ministry is imbalanced. So he will find his balance in the ministry of other members in the Body of Christ. The Body of Christ can be compared to a hospital. When a man is sick and goes to a hospital, the hospital has various departments to help him. Perhaps he needs an injection, or physiotherapy, or surgery. He may need to visit the eye doctor or the ear doctor. So the hospital has various departments. The eye doctor spends all his time just looking at people's eyes and nothing else. That's not because he feels that other parts of the human body are unimportant, but because his specialty is the eye. In the Body of Christ too, each believer has a different gift and calling. And each one is imbalanced by himself. The only perfectly balanced person Who ever walked on this earth was the Lord Jesus Christ. All the rest of us – even the best among us - are imbalanced. We can find our balance only as we work together with other brothers and sisters – with the other departments in the Lord's hospital. So there's no place for individualism in this hospital! A good hospital will have many departments to cater to the various needs of people. In the same way, the Body of Christ too has a variety of ministries and many spiritual gifts to help people. No church or group has all the gifts of the Spirit. But in the total body of Christ, they are all there.

We must know what our own specific calling in the Body is. The world is full of spiritually sick people. And nobody's case is hopeless. Everyone can be fully healed by the Lord. This is the good news of the gospel that we proclaim. The worst sinner and the most perverted person can find healing in the Lord's hospital. A good hospital will never turn away a seriously sick person. Inferior hospitals do that because they are not equipped to handle serious cases. In the same way, a good church will never tell even the greatest sinner in the world that his case is hopeless! A good church will be able to change the worst of sinners into the greatest of saints - if the sinner is willing to take the treatment given.

We can compare the church to a human body too. In the human body, each part has a function; and that part concentrates on fulfilling its own function alone. But it appreciates, values and cooperates with the other parts that have different functions. That's how it must be when we work together with other ministries in the Body of Christ too. In 1 Corinthians 12:1-31, the Holy Spirit uses the example of eyes, ears, hands and feet to picture the way the gifts of the Spirit are exercised in the body of Christ. When you hear me speak, you'll find me emphasizing certain things from the Bible over and over again. That's because that is the burden the Lord has given me. I've stuck to the ministry the Lord has called me to, because I know that is the only ministry in which I can be useful to the Lord. I'll frustrate the Lord's plan for me if I try to do something else. But I'm not against other ministries. I value them highly. The stomach values the hand highly, but it never tries to do what the hand does. For example, it never tries to pick up food from a plate. It allows the hand to do that and then does its own job of digesting the food that the hand picks up and sends down to it! That's a picture of how we complement each other in Christ's Body.

Most believers haven't seen this truth of the variety of ministries in the Body. But if you don't see this truth, you'll never be able to fulfil all that God wants to accomplish.

It's good for all of us to be clear in our own minds as to what God has called us to. The burden the Lord gives us in our hearts is usually an indication of the ministry He has for us in His Body. As far as I'm concerned, it has been crystal clear to me for many years now, what MY ministry in the Body is and also what God wants me to emphasize in my ministry. That clarity has produced great rest in my life and great liberty as well. No-one can now move me away from my ministry - even if they accuse me of being imbalanced! No prophet in the Old Testament was ever balanced in his ministry. Only diplomatic preachers seek to be "balanced". The prophets were all imbalanced. They kept stressing the same thing over and over again - because that was the need of Israel or Judah in their generation - and that was what God laid on their hearts as a burden.

I'm not saying that all of us can know, as soon as we begin serving the Lord, what our gift and calling is. It took me about 15 years after I was born again, before I was clear as to what my ministry was. It may not take that long for you. It may take much less. You'll have to leave the timing with God. But you must understand this clearly that you have a distinct and unique ministry in Christ's Body that no-one else can fulfil. And that ministry will never be a balanced one. It will be imbalanced. You'll have to find your balance by working in fellowship with others who have different ministries in the Body. That's the way God keeps us humble – by making us dependent on others. Praise the Lord!

All of us are strong in some areas of our life, but weak in other areas - just like a student may be good in English and weak in Maths. But we must know where we are weak and strengthen those areas. Your church may be strong in its emphasis on evangelism but weak in its emphasis on holiness. If so, then you know what type of ministry your church needs to expose itself to.

Never judge the success of your labours by your popularity. Jesus pronounced a woe on all those who were "popular" with the people, because that was the identifying mark of a false prophet (Luke 6:26). So if you're a very popular preacher you could be a false prophet! On the other hand, Jesus told His disciples to rejoice when everyone spoke against them, because that was one of the marks of a true prophet (Luke 6:22-23). Do you really believe what Jesus said here?

Remember that every true prophet in Israel's history and in church history was a controversial figure, who was hounded and hated and falsely accused by the religious leaders of his time.

There has not been a single exception to this rule - whether it be Elijah and Jeremiah in Old Testament times, or John the Baptist and Paul in the first century, or John Wesley and Watchman Nee in more modern times. So we should never gauge the eternal success of our labours by how popular we are!

We shouldn't gauge the success of our labours by statistics either - by how many people raised their hands in our meetings or how many people we preached to etc.,

Going by statistics, we would have to say that Jesus' ministry was a total failure, because at the end of His ministry, He had only 11 men to present to His Father (John 17:1-26). But the success of His ministry was seen in the type of people those eleven disciples were! They were worth far more to God, and could accomplish more for God, than eleven million of today's half-hearted,

money-loving, compromising, worldly "believers".

I've felt that if I could produce eleven people of the calibre of those first apostles, in my whole life, my ministry would be a glorious success. But it's not easy to produce even two or three such people. It is far easier to gather a crowd of worldly compromisers who "believe in Jesus", but who do not love Him with ALL their hearts. In every movement that God started in Christendom during the last 20 centuries, decline set in by the time it entered the second generation and it no longer remained the same vibrant, fiery movement that it was when started by its founder. Why?

One reason was that the second generation began to be taken up with numbers. They thought that their increasing in number was the proof that God was blessing them. But the fastest growing groups in the world in recent years have been the cults and fundamentalist-groups of other religions. What does that prove? Just this - that numerical growth is no proof of God's blessing.

God calls us to concentrate on the ministry He has given us in Christ's Body and at the same time, to work in cooperation with others who have different ministries. It is impossible to evaluate accurately the results of our ministry, because we are part of a team - the Body of Christ.

All we need to ensure therefore is that we are faithful to the task God has given us to fulfil.

02.06. CHAPTER 06 BROKEN THROUGH SUBMISSION

CHAPTER 6 BROKEN THROUGH SUBMISSION A spiritual leader will be a broken man.

God breaks us in our early years by setting some authority over us, to whom we have to submit. It is thus that He breaks us. Even Jesus had to submit to the authority of Joseph and Mary for 30 years before God gave Him a ministry. The law of submission is an important law in the Body of Christ. It is similar to the way that law functions in the human body. The right hand, for example, is part of the right arm's "team" and submits to the "leadership" of the right arm. The left hand however, is not a part of this team. It submits to the left arm. In the Body of Christ too, God connects some members (like those in one local church or in one team of workers) more closely with each other than with others.

God guides us in two ways –individually and corporately. The head can tell the right hand to move by itself, without the right arm moving at all. That is individual guidance from the head. There are many matters concerning our personal life, marriage, job, where we are going to live etc., in which we should get individual guidance from Christ our Head. We can get advice from other members of the Body, but we must get our guidance from the Lord directly. But when the head tells the right arm to move up, the right hand moves up, along with the arm, without getting any separate guidance from the head. That is corporate guidance. The right hand cannot say at such a time that it is not going to move because it did not get any individual guidance from the head.

One doesn't need individual guidance in corporate matters. If you're connected to a particular section of Christ's Body, God will guide your leaders in such matters, and you just have to follow them. I'm referring here only to corporate matters that relate to that section of the Body that you are teamed with, and not to personal matters. If you are certain that God has joined you to a certain team, you must move along with your leaders in that team.

We see an example of this in Acts 16:9. Paul and his team (who had been placed together by God) were in Troas, when a vision appeared to Paul in which a man asked him to come to Macedonia and help them. In Acts 16:10, we read that although Paul alone saw the vision, all in his team were convinced that God had called them to preach in Macedonia. How were they convinced of that, when none of them had received any individual guidance from God? Because they had confidence in Paul as the leader of their team. In team-matters, God doesn't have to give individual guidance to everyone in a team. He guides only the leader.

If you don't have confidence in your leader, then of course, you must leave such a team (or such a church) at once. But you should never stay in a church or a Christian organisation and become a cause of rebellion or strife there. God will never bless you if you stay in a group and rebel against its leadership - even if the leadership is wrong. Leave the group and join another. That is the best thing to do.

We must distinguish however, between ecclesiastical authorities appointed by men and spiritual authorities appointed by God. Today, many Christians are in leadership positions, not by virtue of

their having been appointed by God and having fathered spiritual children and churches, like the apostle Paul, but on the basis of elections and appointments by human authorities. The diocesan bishop sends a priest to a particular parish and the General Superintendent sends a pastor to a particular church. Such people are not spiritual authorities but ecclesiastical authorities.

Spiritual authorities are appointed by God Himself. They do not impose themselves on others, like ecclesiastical authorities do. They wait for others to accept their authority voluntarily. Believers submit to such authorities, because they recognise the anointing of God on them. A spiritual leader is one who has earned the confidence of others.

Submission to a godly man will not only protect us from doing many foolish things, but will also enable us to learn a great deal of wisdom from him. He will be able to warn us about dangers that he himself has faced that we may be unaware of. So to be under spiritual authority is as safe for us, as it is for children to be under their parents. In 1 Peter 5:5 we read that younger men should be subject to their elders, because God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble. Here is a great secret of obtaining spiritual authority from God. I've known many fine brothers who were never given spiritual authority by God, for just one reason: They never learned to be subject to anyone in their entire lives. And so their strong will was never broken.

Authority is a very dangerous thing in the hands of an unbroken man. If you're not broken first and you try to exercise authority over people you'll ruin them and you'll destroy yourself in the process too. God has to break the strength of our pride first before He can commit spiritual authority to any of us.

Even to exercise authority in a home, in a godly way, as a husband or as a father, one has to be a broken man. If you want your wife and children to be subject to you, you've got to first learn to be subject to spiritual authorities yourself. Only then will God back you up in what you do in your home.

Let me tell you of my own experience briefly. Between the ages of 20 and 30 in my life, God allowed me to be pushed down and publicly humiliated in more than one church, by elders who were jealous of my ministry. In all those instances, the Lord told me to keep my mouth shut and to submit to those elders without questioning them. And I did. I kept a good relationship with them when I was in their assemblies and even after leaving their assemblies. In those years, I never knew what ministry God had in store for me in the future. But God was preparing me to exercise spiritual authority by breaking me over a period of many years. He broke me time and again and taught me in those years that He was in total control of everything that others did to me. The result was that many years later when God gave me spiritual authority over people, I could never exercise it like a dictator, but with compassion.

God hasn't finished with breaking me as yet. Over the past few years, God has taken me through new and unique trials that I've never experienced before. But His purpose in my life remains the same - to break me even more, so that He can commit more of His life and His authority to me.

Another way in which God breaks our strength and pride is by correcting us through our leaders. Almost all believers find it very difficult to receive correction. It's not easy for even a two-year-old child to receive correction - especially if it's given publicly. When was the last time you joyfully accepted public correction? Have you accepted it even once in your life? If not, then it's not

surprising that you lack spiritual authority. When someone, who is over you in the Lord, corrects you, it doesn't matter if he did it in a harsh way. You must still humble yourself under the hand of God Who allowed your leader to correct you - even if you didn't deserve the correction and even if it wasn't your fault.

Jesus was publicly humiliated and falsely accused by His enemies of many things. But He never complained. And He has given us an example to follow.

Even if God allows an enemy to criticize you, just ask yourself whether there's any truth in his criticism. That's all that matters. He's actually giving you a free check-up! Don't bother about how he did the "scanning" or what the motive behind the scanning was! Such matters are unimportant. All you need to ask yourself is whether the "scan" revealed some unChristlikeness in your life.

I get a lot of criticism from people in my ministry. I know that true servants of the Lord have always been criticised and falsely accused. So I am not disturbed by criticism. I only ask the Lord to show me if there's any truth in what is said. Our enemies often tell us more truths about ourselves than our friends do. So we should not write off all criticism as false.

If I've got a black stain on my face and an enemy points it out to me, I should be thankful to him, because he has shown me something that I couldn't have seen myself. I can then go and wash off that stain! It doesn't matter even if he said it to me with an evil motive or to humiliate me. He still helped me to cleanse myself! This was one big difference between Peter and Judas Iscariot. When Peter told the Lord foolishly to avoid going to the cross, the Lord rebuked him sternly saying, "Get behind me, Satan". That was the strongest rebuke that Jesus ever gave any man. Even the Pharisees were only called "vipers". But Peter was called "Satan". Jesus' strongest rebukes were reserved for those who were closest to Him. He rebukes most those whom He loves the most (Revelation 3:19).

Soon after that, when many disciples were getting offended with the Lord's teaching and leaving Him, the Lord asked His disciples if they too wanted to go away. It was Peter who then replied saying, "Lord to whom shall we go. You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:60, 66-68). What were the words of eternal life that Peter had heard? "Get behind me Satan"! Do we see words of correction as words meant to lead us to eternal life?

That's how Peter saw correction and that's what made him the man he became.

There was yet another occasion when Peter accepted correction from the Lord. Peter had told the Lord at the last supper that even if all the other disciples denied the Lord, he wouldn't. The Lord immediately replied that Peter would deny Him thrice within the next 12 hours. But Peter didn't get offended with that reply. It was such a man that the Lord finally took up and made His chief apostle and spokesman on the day of Pentecost.

Because Peter humbled himself under correction, God exalted him. Having learnt from his own experience, Peter now exhorts all of us in 1 Peter 5:5-6 to humble ourselves always. We'll never lose anything by humbling ourselves. One day God will exalt us. In contrast to Peter's attitude to correction, look at Judas Iscariot's attitude to correction. When a woman anointed Jesus with an expensive perfume, Judas said it was a waste to spend money like that, when it could have been given to the poor (John 12:5; Matthew 26:10-13). Jesus corrected Judas very gently and asked

him to leave the woman alone, because she had done a good work. But Judas was offended. In the very next verse (Matthew 26:14), we read that Judas went immediately to the chief priests and agreed to betray Jesus. The timing of this is very significant. Judas was hurt, because Jesus had corrected him publicly.

All that Jesus had told Judas was that his assessment of the woman's action was not correct. But that was enough to upset him. When you're not broken, one small thing will be enough to offend you. But look at the eternal consequences of Judas' reaction. And look at the eternal results of Peter's reaction. Both of them were tested by correction – one failed, while the other passed.

Today, we're being tested in the same way.

If public correction offends us, it only proves that we're seeking the honour of men. If so, it's good to know it now, so that we can cleanse ourselves from such honour-seeking. God may have allowed such a situation to show us how much we are slaves to man's opinions. Now we can cleanse ourselves and be free.

So, let's have Peter's attitude to correction at all times – whether the Lord corrects us directly by His Spirit or through someone else. This is the pathway of eternal life for all of us. If we humble ourselves, we'll receive grace from God and He will exalt us at the right time.

Unbroken people tend to be lonely people - lonely leaders and lonely believers. They never submit to anyone. They go where they want to go and do what they want to do. Such unbroken believers can work only with those who obey them and accept everything they say. There are lots of believers like that, who flit around from church to church and from organisation to organisation, like butterflies going from flower to flower. They waste their lives, accomplishing nothing. They become wanderers like Cain, because, like Cain, they're unwilling to accept the Lord's correction (Genesis 4:12).

God can never commit spiritual authority to such "loners", because He's building a Body and not a bunch of individualistic believers!

02.07. CHAPTER 07 RESPONSIBLE FOR OTHERS

CHAPTER 7 RESPONSIBLE FOR OTHERS A spiritual leader will keep watch over the souls in his flock, since he has to give an account to God one day for each of them (Hebrews 13:17).

I've told my co-workers in our churches in India that I'll be responsible for their souls, since they look up to me as their elder brother. And so I tell them what's good for them, even if it hurts them - just like I would to my own children at home. Every pastor and elder is answerable to God for the people under his charge.

God gives His children spiritual leaders just like He gives earthly fathers to children in homes. I'm the father of four sons. During the years that my boys were at home, I guided them and advised them concerning many matters. They submitted to me and obeyed me. That protected them from many dangers. Even now, after they are grown up, I still advise them now and then – because I'm their father. In the same way we are to be spiritual fathers to those whom God lays on our hearts.

God will give you a prophetic word for your flock only if you're willing to be like a father to them. You have to carry your flock on your heart before God, before He can give you an appropriate word for them. Paul had a word for each church he wrote to, because he carried them on his heart (as he says in Php 1:7) and prayed for them regularly. If you don't have such a care and a burden for your flock, you'll only be a professional pastor working for a salary.

What does it mean to give "an account" for people's souls? The word "account" is a financial word. If you're preparing a balance sheet and the income on the left side totals 5,000 rupees and the expenditure on the right side totals only 4,999 rupees, something is wrong. The difference may be only one rupee, but it is still a faulty statement of accounts. You have to account for that one rupee too, because accounting is a very exact science. To render account to God therefore means that you must know exactly how things are going spiritually with your flock. You have to take this matter very seriously, because spiritual leadership is a more serious task than conducting a complicated surgical operation in a hospital. Lives are at stake – for eternity.

You are responsible for the believers in your church. You can't make them spiritual. But you must do everything to bring them into a living relationship with the Lord. Your goal must be "to present every one of them perfect in Christ" (Colossians 1:28). You can't prevent them from backsliding, but you should have warned them before they do backslide.

Once when a young brother in our church backslid, I was distressed. I asked the Lord, why it happened and whether there had been some failure on my part – perhaps some lack of sensitivity in me to what was happening in his life. Was there a word of warning or encouragement that I should have given him? I judged myself, because I was answerable to God for that young life.

We must judge ourselves every time someone under our charge falls away. We don't have to feel condemned about it. But we must ask the Lord if He has something to tell us through it. We should not allow Satan to take us on a "guilt trip". But we must learn lessons from our mistakes for the

future.

God can show us things that our human reasoning can never show us. If we are sensitive to God's voice, He will prompt us in advance to help people who are slipping up. He may one day, for no apparent reason, ask us to go and visit someone. I've had some experiences like that. Usually I've no clue as to why I have to visit the person, because God does not reveal the sins and problems of others to me. (I'm thankful for that, because I don't want to pollute my mind with the knowledge of other people's sins). The Lord prompts me then to share something with that brother. What I tell him may help him, without my even knowing what his problem was. And usually I won't even know that I've helped him.

If we have the habit of listening to God, He will arrange our circumstances such that we come in touch with people who are in need and with whom we can share the very word that will meet their need. That was how Jesus lived (as we read in Isaiah 50:4). The Father spoke to Him every day and gave Him words to speak to the weary. That is the type of leader we should all become. When I was in the Navy, the shift system on the ships used to be called "watches". These were four-hour shifts, during which one officer would "keep watch" and be responsible for everything that happened on the ship. If I was "on watch" at sea, from midnight to 4 in the morning, I would have to stand on the "bridge" (the top part of the ship) with two or three sailors. All the others on the ship would be asleep. I would have to look out for other ships crossing our path and ensure that my ship was going in the right direction. I had to make course-corrections due to the drift caused by the wind and the waves. The safety of the ship and the direction the ship was going in, were all my responsibility during those 4 hours. I could not afford to sleep for even a minute during my "watch". So when the Bible speaks about our "keeping watch" over others, this is a very serious matter. It requires alertness on the part of a spiritual leader to keep watch over people's lives, to ensure that they don't go astray, or drift away, or get lost.

Every good hospital has what they call "Daily rounds", when the doctors go around and check the condition of the patients. Those doctors don't just look out over all the wards in a general sort of way and decide that all the patients look healthy. No. They examine each patient individually. But what do many pastors do? They just look out at all their church-members on Sunday mornings and decide that everyone appears to be doing fine spiritually. But there are a lot of people who look very healthy on the outside who are actually very sick on the inside - both in hospitals and in churches! Some who look very healthy may be having "cancer" eating away their insides. It could be that some of those happy-looking people in your church who clap and shout "Hallelujah" may be having serious problems in their family-lives. As a doctor checks up each patient individually, a spiritual leader must also "check up" ("keep watch over") each individual soul. The Bible exhorts all shepherds to "know well the condition of their flocks" (Proverbs 27:23). When the numbers in a church increase, the only way for a leader to continue to "keep watch" over the souls under his charge, is by delegating this responsibility to other faithful men who have been trained to do the same thing.

It is impossible for any one man to take individual care of people beyond a certain number. I personally think that number is only twelve, because that was the number that Jesus disciplined. No doctor can look after many, many hospital-wards, no matter how good a doctor he is. We all have our physical limitations.

Those who have an apostolic ministry and who have responsibility for many churches, should know the condition of the elders in all their churches. Only if the elders are spiritual will their churches be spiritual.

Unfortunately most pastors and elders are like doctors who treat patients in an "outpatient clinic", where they just write prescriptions and send the patients away, never knowing (or caring) whether their patients lived or died! A spiritual leader however takes the responsibility of the souls under his charge very seriously.

02.08. CHAPTER 08 MINISTERING FROM LIFE

CHAPTER 8 MINISTERING FROM LIFE A spiritual leader ministers to others from his life and not from his intellect.

Under the old covenant, God used men even when their private lives were immoral. Samson could deliver the Israelites even when he was living in sin. The Spirit of God didn't leave him even when he committed adultery. God's anointing left him only when he cut his hair and broke his covenant with God. David had many wives. Yet the anointing of God remained upon him and he even wrote Scripture. But ministry in the new covenant is totally different. 2 Corinthians 3:1-18 contrasts service under the old covenant with service under the new. The difference is basically this: Under the old covenant, the priests studied the Law carefully and taught the people what God had said in His Word. But in the new covenant, we follow Jesus Who spoke God's Word from out of His inner life and walk with His Father. There's a lot of difference between preaching from our life and preaching from our knowledge.

If there is shallowness in the lives of most believers in India today, it is because the lives of their leaders are shallow. The people's lives are carnal, because the leader's life - his thought-life, his relationship with his wife, and children and fellow-workers - is carnal. The ministry of such leaders is only the dissemination of information. This is an old covenant ministry.

Any preacher who communicates only information is an old covenant preacher. All the information he gives out may be accurate. But if he is not communicating life he is not a servant of the new covenant. The old covenant was a covenant of the letter whereas the new covenant is a covenant of life. The letter kills but the Spirit gives life. In the old covenant, God gave Israel laws to keep. But in the new covenant, God has given us an Example - in the Person of Jesus. His LIFE is the light of men. The light today is not a doctrine or a teaching, but Jesus' own life manifested through us. Anything other than this is darkness - even if it be evangelical doctrine. In the Old Testament, God's written Law was the light, as we read in Psalms 119:105. But then the Word became flesh and Jesus Himself became the Light of the world (John 8:12) His life was the light of men (John 1:4). But Jesus told His disciples that He could be the Light of the world only as long as He was here on earth (John 9:5). Now that He has gone to heaven, He has left us in this world to be its light (Matthew 5:14). So our responsibility is very great to show forth that light - by our lives. A church invariably becomes like its leader. In Revelation 2 and 3, we see that in each of the seven cases, the Lord spoke the same message to the church as He did to its messenger. Each message concluded with the statement that the Spirit was saying the same thing to that church. Where five messengers (elders) were carnal, their churches were carnal. And where two messengers were spiritual, their churches were spiritual too. The messenger in Laodicea was lukewarm and so was his church. The messenger in Philadelphia was faithful and so was his church. In Genesis 1:1-31, a phrase that occurs frequently is 'after their kind'. We read there of fruit trees bearing fruit after their kind, plants yielding seed after their kind, the fish and the birds after their kind, and beasts, creeping things and cattle after their kind (Genesis 1:11, Genesis

1:12, Genesis 1:21, Genesis 1:25). In creation, everything produces after its own kind.

God created Adam "in the likeness of God" (Genesis 5:1). But Adam produced a son "according to his own image" (Genesis 5:3). He could not produce a son in the likeness of God. He could produce one only after his own kind.

Spiritually too, we will all produce children according to our own likeness and after our own kind. If we are the intellectual type, we will produce intellectually-minded people through our ministry. If we are misers, we will produce misers. And if we're haughty and proud, we will produce haughty people through our ministry. On the other hand, if we have the spirit of a servant, our spiritual children will have a servant-spirit too

It is possible however, that a rare brother may break out of his leader's mould and seek God for himself and become spiritual, in spite of his leader's carnality. But such a case is rare. Generally speaking, most believers are like sheep who blindly follow their leader, wherever he goes. Like preacher, like people! And when both sheep and leader are blind, they both fall into the ditch.

Remember that the believers in your church will go out and reproduce others after their kind too. And then you'll have grandchildren after your kind! So you had better be careful right now, what type of children you're going to produce - because this process will continue, until Jesus returns.

It's important right at the beginning therefore, to ensure that you make disciples in your church and not just converts. To do that, you must be a disciple yourself. You must have a life that you can pass on to others.

Converts will go out and make other converts, who in turn will go out and make still more converts. Such converts may understand the message of salvation, but they will have no desire to follow the Lord. They will have knowledge but no life. But if you make disciples, they will go out and make more disciples. So transmitting life to others is fundamental. The tabernacle in the Old Testament was a picture of the church. That tabernacle, as you know, had three parts - an outer court, a holy place and a most holy place (where God dwelt). The people in the outer court symbolise believers who just have their sins forgiven. They don't take any responsibility in their local church. They come to the meetings, listen to the messages, give their offerings, break bread and go home. The people in the holy place are those who seek to serve in the church in some way - like the Levites who lit the lampstand and put incense on the altar. But those in the most holy place are the ones who enter the new covenant, seek fellowship with God and are united with the other disciples as one body. They minister from their life and constitute the real church, the functioning church, the ones who battle Satan and keep the Body of Christ pure. In many churches however, there is no such central core. In every church - in the best and in the worst - those sitting in the outer court will be of the same type - half-hearted, worldly, seeking their own, lovers of money and lovers of ease and pleasure. But a good church will have a strong inner core of leaders who are godly. This core determines which way the church is going to go. The central core will usually begin with two men who have become one with each other. God will be with them and the core will begin to grow in size and unity. A human body too begins with two dissimilar units becoming one in a mother's womb. As that little embryo begins to grow bigger, the cells all remain united. But if at any time those cells break away from each other, that will be the end of that baby!

It's the same with the building of a local church as an expression of Christ's Body. If the core splits up, that will be the end of the real church, even if the external structure continues to remain as an institution!

Hebrews is one book in the New Testament that contrasts the new covenant with the old. Unfortunately, Hebrews is not a popular book with many Christians. Romans, Ephesians and Philippians are popular books, but not Hebrews! That's because Hebrews is full of meat, not milk - and most believers haven't got their "teeth" as yet. They're still babes. The very first sentence in Hebrews says that in past times God spoke through the prophets, but now He has spoken through His Son. The old covenant was mostly a communication of commandments from God, with their "Thou shalt"s and "Thou shalt not"s. But the new covenant is a communication of LIFE from God through His Son. That was why the Father sent Jesus to earth as a baby. It would have been no problem for God to send Jesus to earth as a full grown man. But He came as a baby so that He could have the same experiences that we have, and face the same temptations that we face, from childhood onwards. But most Christians think of Jesus only in terms of His 3½ years of ministry and His death on Calvary. I think it would be right to say that 99% of believers never think of how Jesus lived during the 30 years He was in Nazareth. They think of His birth. That is celebrated every year. They think of his death and resurrection. That too is celebrated every year. And they think of the miracles He did. That's about all.

Hardly anyone thinks of the major part of Jesus' life. His ministry was only 10% of His earthly life – 3½ years out of 33½ years. And His birth and His death were just one-day events. The major part of His life was the 30 years He spent in Nazareth. His whole ministry was based on those 30 years. It took Him 30 years to prepare the sermons He preached during His ministry. He didn't preach "the sermon on the mount" the way preachers prepare their sermons these days - sitting down in their study and consulting books and concordances and writing down their notes and preparing three neat little points that all begin with the same letter of the alphabet!! No. That sermon came out of His life. He took 30 years to prepare it. That's why it was so powerful and that's why the people marvelled at the authority with which He spoke (Matthew 7:28-29). In the old covenant, we read that God spoke to Jeremiah only on certain days. Jeremiah dictated what God spoke, to his scribe Baruch who wrote down exactly what Jeremiah dictated. In the same way, God spoke to Ezekiel only at certain times and told him what to say to the people of Judah. And Ezekiel went and told the people exactly that. That was good. Even if we had preaching like that today, it would be great! But new covenant ministry is even better! God didn't speak to Jesus only on certain days, as He had done to those Old Testament prophets. God spoke to Jesus every day and Jesus spoke to people every day from His life. His ministry flowed out of His life. That's the meaning of "rivers of living water flowing out from our innermost being" (John 7:38). In the light of this, it is good to ask yourself whether you're producing new covenant disciples or old covenant converts in your church. The answer to that depends on whether you're a new covenant servant or an old covenant one yourself! The Old Testament prophet was only a messenger. To pass on a message, all you need is a good memory. But in the new covenant, God doesn't give us messages to pass on to others but His life! Then what you need is not a good memory, but a good life - the Divine life.

Let me illustrate the difference: If you collect some water from a tap (get a message from God) and pour it out - that would be a picture of old covenant ministry. Then you could go back and collect

some more water from the tap (get another message from God) and pour that out too. But in the new covenant, we are given a spring of water (the life of Jesus Himself) within us. And that flows out from within us constantly. So we don't have to keep going to God each time, to get a message. He makes us the message. Our life itself is the message and we speak from that!

Most people have a pouring ministry. Some have nothing to give when they pour out, while others have something to give. But both are still pouring. And then both of them run dry. But Jesus told the woman in Samaria that he would put a spring of eternal life within her that would flow out of her constantly. (Eternal life means the life of God Himself.) This life is what the Lord desires should flow out from within us too - not just a message. This is new covenant ministry.

02.09. CHAPTER 09 SERVING BY GODS POWER

CHAPTER 9 SERVING BY GOD'S POWER A spiritual leader does all of his work in the will of God, by the power of God, and for the glory of God. Therefore it will come through the final fire of testing as gold, silver and precious stones (1 Corinthians 3:12-15). In 2 Corinthians 3:5-6, Paul says that we can never become servants of the new covenant unless God equips us and makes us adequate. Since a spiritual leader serves with the adequacy that God gives him, he cannot take any credit for his labours.

If it's really God's life that is flowing through us and blessing others, then we can't take any credit for it ourselves - because we can't take the credit for what we never produced! For example, if I brought a cake here that someone else had baked, and I pass it around, and all of you appreciate it and say, "Brother Zac, that was a fantastic cake"- I won't even be tempted to be proud, because I didn't bake it! I was only distributing what someone else had baked. But if I had baked it myself, then I could become proud, thinking I'd done a good job. But how can I take credit for what someone else made? This is one way by which we can know whether what we are passing on to others was what God produced within us, or what we produced ourselves. Are we proud of our ministry (the cake)? Then we must have produced that ministry (the cake) ourselves! God had nothing to do with it. If God had produced it, we could not possibly be proud of it. Do you think Jesus' disciples could have taken any credit for the loaves and the fishes that they passed out to the multitude. No. Not even the boy who gave his lunch-packet to Jesus could have taken the credit for that. The disciples only distributed what Jesus produced.

Praise God that we are only in the distribution business and not in the production business. That's why we can be at perfect rest at all times. The strain comes only when we have to produce - not when we have to distribute! It's true that we may get tired in the distribution business. But there is no strain. Our adequacy is from God. We know we can't produce anything worthwhile ourselves. So we don't even try.

Remember that everything that you accomplish without the help of the Holy Spirit is human and has no eternal value. You can preach and accomplish a lot, without prayer, without seeking God's help and without the power of the Holy Spirit. You may have great human abilities and with them you can do a great deal. But one day you'll discover that it was all wood, hay and straw in God's eyes.

You may think you're a great communicator because you can stir people up emotionally. But look at how rock-music stars stir people up. They can stir up people better than any preacher can! But it's all empty emotion. Or you may be a great intellectual who can tickle people's brains and hold them gripped for hours when you speak. That's human soul-power too. There may be no communication of divine life there.

Whatever you accomplish in your ministry without the help of the Holy Spirit, will perish with this world. You can be absolutely sure of that. I don't know if you believe me. But if you do, you won't

waste your time any more, adopting human methods.

I don't want to waste my time building something that is going to perish in eternity. I want to serve with the power that God gives. Our adequacy is from God. The Pharisees were the great Bible-scholars of Jesus' time. They were fundamental in their doctrine unlike the liberal Sadducees. We know that, because Jesus Himself endorsed the correctness of their doctrines by telling His disciples to do all that the Pharisees taught (Matthew 23:3). Those Pharisees were the leading professors in the Bible-seminaries of those days. Gamaliel was the principal of the Bible seminary that Saul of Tarsus attended in Jerusalem. Many of those Pharisees were great mission-leaders too. Jesus spoke of them as men who crossed land and sea to make proselytes (Matthew 23:15). That would have involved sacrifice and dedication.

Yet we see that a major part of Jesus' ministry was spent confronting those fundamentalist seminary professors and mission leaders! We must find out why. Because if we don't, we can be like them too. And then the Lord will be confronting us continually!

Those leaders were always questioning Jesus as to why He and His disciples did this or did not do that! They were always quoting their traditions to Jesus and pointing out where He and His disciples had violated them.

I've seen so much of this attitude in the "believers" who criticise me too. They question me about some little expression I used here or some word I used there. They love to "have disputes about words" (1 Timothy 6:4) – the very thing Paul told Timothy to avoid. But they don't seem to be bothered about their own lack of divine life! They remind me of people counting the fingers on a dead man's hand to see that all the fingers are there! And if even one fingernail is missing, they create a big uproar!

I'd rather have a living man with five fingers missing than a dead man who has all his fingers and fingernails intact! A lot of theologians may be dead right in their doctrines, but they are both dead and right! I'd rather work with a brother whose doctrine on baptism is wrong but who is filled with the Holy Spirit than with someone who has been baptized the right way, but who is as dead as a doornail!

Now, don't get me wrong here! I've always been very strong on doctrine all my Christian life. I've left a lot of Christian groups, because they didn't preach the whole counsel of God. So I'm not devaluing doctrine. But what I'm trying to say is that life and spirituality are far more important.

One day after Jesus had rebuked and corrected the Pharisees, His disciples came to Him and told Him, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended by what You said". Jesus told them not to bother about those Pharisees, because they were blind leaders of the blind and "every plant that God has not planted will be rooted out one day" (Matthew 15:12-13).

I want you to think of that last statement for a moment. Whenever you preach, you're planting a seed. If what you're planting is not from God, it will be pulled out one day. Our work will remain for eternity if we do it with the adequacy supplied by the Holy Spirit. But if we do our work for God without prayer, without leaning on God in helpless dependence on Him and without His Spirit's help, then it will certainly be rooted out one day.

There are many aspects of Christian work for which we don't need the power of the Holy Spirit, but only plenty of money and a good administrator. For example, if you're arranging a Christian conference, a lot of work is involved. A hall has to be hired, invitations have to be sent out, accommodation has to be arranged, food-arrangements have to be made etc., etc., But all of this can be done by any good administrator who is not even a Christian. In fact, many worldly conferences are organized in a far better way than most Christian conferences. But the part of a Christian conference that is going to remain for all eternity is the ministry of the Word - and that part must be done under the Spirit's anointing!

I'm not devaluing the necessity of making good arrangements. They're needed for the success of any conference. But remember that what's eternal will only be that which was done in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let's apply this to our own ministry. Let's ask ourselves what part of our ministry can be explained away as being merely the result of having human training and human resources. We may be surprised to discover the answer - if we are honest with ourselves.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. His conflict even today is with Bible-seminary professors and mission leaders who have knowledge without life and who transmit information without the anointing of the Holy Spirit. The apostles had a conflict with such people in their day and we will also be in conflict with such people in our day, if we walk in Jesus' footsteps.

I'd rather walk with the Lord and be in conflict with such people than please them and displease the Lord. In fact I'm prepared to be in conflict with the whole world if necessary, if that is the price I have to pay to please God. If we seek to please men we can never be servants of Christ (Galatians 1:10).

Let us walk then in helpless dependence on God for our ministry, always longing for the anointing of the Spirit to be upon us.

02.10. CHAPTER 10 EXERCISING SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

CHAPTER 10 EXERCISING SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY A spiritual leader will minister with spiritual authority. The multitudes were amazed at Jesus' preaching, because they saw a difference between the way He taught and the way the Pharisees had taught them for so many years. The Pharisees had a lot of knowledge. Jesus had even more knowledge than they had. But it was His authority that impressed His hearers, not His knowledge (Matthew 7:29).

If we have knowledge but no spiritual authority in our ministry, we will be like the Pharisees. God backed up the words that Jesus spoke. This is what it means to speak with spiritual authority.

Jesus told His disciples in John 15:26-27 that the Holy Spirit would bear witness along with them. This meant that whenever they preached, the Holy Spirit would back up what they said. That's certainly how I want my ministry to be at all times. As I bear witness to Jesus, the Holy Spirit must also bear witness to what I say. He must speak to the hearts of my listeners saying, "Listen to that. That's from God". Then I'll be speaking with Divine authority. But if I merely give a very accurate testimony about Jesus, and the Holy Spirit doesn't back up what I say, I won't be called a heretic, because my doctrines are all evangelical. But I will still be ministering death, and not life.

There are many ways in which we can exercise authority over people. There are human ways, religious ways and spiritual ways. And there's a lot of difference between these three. Jesus authority was not human or religious. He never spoke or acted like an earthly king or like the religious leaders of Israel. His authority was Divine and spiritual. A good example of human authority would be the authority that film stars and rock musicians exercise. Look at the way people worship them and go crazy over them. People stand for hours in the rain and the sun to get a glimpse of them. They have great authority over people. They use their human abilities to rule over people's minds and emotions - and then get the people to pay them money too! This type of authority is found among many preachers in Christendom too. It is the power of the human soul and not of the Holy Spirit.

Another way to exercise human authority would be through money. The world is controlled today not by those who have weapons but by those who have money. Money is a very important factor in wars and in elections too. The business community in every country has to please the political leaders in order to thrive. And the political leaders in turn, have to please the business community in order to get money to get to power. So money has tremendous power. And this power is being used extensively in Christendom too. Money can certainly do a lot of good. But because money is powerful, it does a lot of damage too.

If Christian work anywhere is controlled by financial power, it can never be a spiritual work. Jesus placed money in direct opposition to God. He said that God and Mammon (material wealth) were the only two masters in the world competing for the attention of men (Luke 16:13). The authority that a Christian leader has, through giving money to others is not spiritual authority. Both in the world and in Christendom, it is the one who has the money who pulls the strings. People will bow

down to anyone who has money. They will agree to anything you say and do everything you tell them to, if only you pay them! This is true in secular companies and in Christian organisations as well.

Almost every pastor is controlled by the board members of his church, because the board determines his salary. Such a pastor dare not say anything that will offend those board-members! Churches usually have their richest men on their boards. And these rich men are usually the ones who need to be rebuked the most. But how can a pastor rebuke them if his mouth is full of the money they have stuffed into it? He can't. So he has to tickle those rich men's ears and say exactly what they want to hear. If he displeases them, they won't give him his annual increment and that'll be enough to make him change. He'll think of his poor family that will have to struggle. He'll have to vacate his convenient pastoral house and he'll have to take his children out of that good school. Such thoughts will make him quickly submit to the board and toe the official line quietly! This is the main reason why we have hardly any prophets in India today. Almost every preacher has fallen a prey to the lure of money. How can such preachers ever exercise spiritual authority?

I want to say to those of you brothers who are in authority over others, that if you control anyone through money, what you are exercising will not be spiritual authority.

Jesus never controlled anyone through money. Not one of His disciples followed Him for money, for He had no wealth to give them. He offered them no retirement benefits in this world, but only tribulation and suffering. He taught them to seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness first and told them that the material things they needed (the bare minimum of food and clothing) would be added to them by their Heavenly Father.

Jesus sent out His apostles to evangelize the world, without any money so that those apostles would never be able to draw anyone (or control anyone) through money. Yet they did a much better job of evangelizing the then-known world than we have done with all our money and our gadgets and our many conferences on evangelism!

Financial power is something that we have to be very careful about in God's work, for it can rob us of spiritual authority.

Music power is another power that we have to beware of. Rock music can sway people to the point where they even commit suicide. There are many forms of power like that in the world today. We have to be careful that we don't mistake these for spiritual power. If we are unable to distinguish between spiritual power and soul-power, it will be easy to deceive ourselves about the success of our ministry. With some of us, the power we're using may not be money-power or music-power but intellectual power. That too is the power of the soul - and that is very different from having spiritual authority. We can try and impress people with our qualifications in order to get them to listen to us! Maybe you're so theologically qualified that you can explain the root meanings of the Greek words that Peter used in his epistles - meanings that Peter himself did not know! But a spiritual man will teach the Bible in an entirely different way - and the results will be different too. The Bible can be taught by the power of the human intellect or by the power of the Holy Spirit. And there is a vast difference between these two ways of teaching - and their results.

One of the greatest needs in the church today is for a demonstration of spiritual authority in the ministry of its leaders. Spiritual authority is very different from religious authority. What we commonly see in Christendom today is religious authority, where strong leaders dominate their flock. A local church was never meant by God to be run as a democracy where everybody is given a vote to choose its leader. Neither did God intend it to be run as a dictatorship by a strong leader who rules the poor believers and makes them bow down and obey him.

It's easy, when we preach God's word to have power over people. People appreciate our ministry because it helps them. Then it becomes easy for us to become like little gods to our admirers. We must always live in fear of that. We must never take advantage of the authority we have over others through our gift. We must never try to run other people's lives. If we find them clinging to us, we must gently cast them on the Lord – for their own good and their spiritual growth. Our calling is to build the Body of Christ and not our own little empires. This is the way of spiritual authority.

Paul had such spiritual authority given him by God that he could even deliver a person in the church at Corinth to Satan for the destruction of his flesh so that the man could be saved (1 Corinthians 5:5). The man was saved later and came back to the church in repentance. Paul was the founding father of that church and such fathers have a spiritual authority that no-one else can exercise. Those apostles had Divine authority given them by the Lord to build people up. This is the type of loving authority that we need too. We see many manifestations of such spiritual authority in the life of the apostle Paul, that are a tremendous challenge to us. When the disciples observed Jesus for 3½ years, they saw that He was totally different from the leaders and preachers they had seen in their synagogues. They had never met anyone who lived like Him or who spoke like Him. He had authority in His life and in His ministry. Until they met Jesus, they had thought that spiritual ministry was what they had seen in their priests and their bishops in the synagogues. And if they had never met Jesus, they would have made those priests and bishops their role-models. But now they had a new role Model they could follow.

What our young people need are better role-models to follow. It is our responsibility to be those role-models, as men with spiritual authority.

02.11. CHAPTER 11 FREED FROM ALL FEARS

CHAPTER 11 FREED FROM ALL FEARS A spiritual leader will not take decisions based on the fear of men or of circumstances.

I have a large verse hanging in the front room of my house that reads, "If you fear God, you need fear nothing else". That's the Living Bible paraphrase of Isaiah 8:12 and 13. That verse has been of tremendous help to me in the last 25 years.

Let me share with you some of the truths that I've learnt from the Lord on this matter of fear.

First of all, I've learnt that fear is one of the main weapons in Satan's armoury.

Secondly, I've learnt that I don't need to feel condemned if feelings of fear come to me at times - because I'm still in the flesh. We must be realistic and honest about this. The apostle Paul was quite honest and admitted that he had "fears within" him, at certain times (2 Corinthians 7:5). The third thing I've learnt (and this is the most important) is that even if I do have fears, I must never take a decision based on fear. My decisions must always be based on faith in God – the very opposite of fear. And that's how I've sought to live for many years now. And God has helped me and encouraged me tremendously.

I now understand why Jesus so frequently said "Fear not, fear not, fear not". This is as important as the other emphasis in the New Testament : "Sin not, sin not, sin not."

Jesus was always against sin and He was always against fear. He told us to fear only God and no-one else (Matthew 10:28). This is a very important lesson for us to learn, because a spiritual leader must never take any decision based on fear.

Another verse that I've had hanging in my sitting room for many years is Galatians 1:10 : "If I seek to please men I cannot be the servant of Christ".

If you seek to please men you can never be a servant of the Lord. And I'll tell you it's not easy to break free from seeking to please men.

Many reports of Christian work sent from India to the West are basically meant to impress people there, so that they will support a work here financially. You have to be very careful about your motives when you write a report about your work. A lot of sermons likewise, are prepared with the motive of impressing men and pleasing them. But those who preach with such motives can never be servants of Christ. It's easy to fool an undiscerning group of immature believers in your church that you're a great man of God. But you can't fool God and you can't fool the devil. Both God and the devil know exactly what type of person you are.

If you've a fear in your heart that someone will harm you in some way if you displease him, then you'll always try to please him. Then you can never be a servant of God. If ever you act on the basis of fear, you can be sure that it is the devil who is guiding you, and not God.

If we look back over our lives, we'll find that we've taken many decisions in the past on the basis of fear. In all those decisions, we were not led by God. The consequences of some of those decisions may not have been serious. But we missed God's best. We should act differently in future.

It's natural for us to feel fear - because we're human. For example, if you suddenly saw a cobra in front of you where you're sitting right now, you'd naturally get a shock and jump up - and adrenalin would rush into your blood stream. That's natural. But you don't live in fear of finding a cobra under every chair – everywhere you go!

We must not live in fear of anyone either.

We must never take a decision based on the fear of men or Satan. Every decision we take must be based on the fear of God and in total faith in our heavenly Father. Only then can we be sure that we're being led by the Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 13:6 is a very important verse for all of us who serve the Lord. It says there: "We boldly say that the Lord is our Helper and we will not be afraid. What can any man do to us?"

We must distinguish however, between being cautious and being afraid. We must be wise - as wise as serpents - in this world. But we don't have to fear any man or woman or demon or even Satan himself.

Jesus was cautious. When He heard that people were wanting to kill Him in Judea, He didn't go there (John 7:1). That was sensible. That was wise. But Jesus was never afraid of anyone.

If you were to go into a forest at night, you'd take a torchlight with you. That's caution - not fear. If people are trying to kill you somewhere, you shouldn't go there - unless God Himself tells you to go. Jesus did finally go to Jerusalem when the Holy Spirit led Him to – and He was killed. But that was in God's will and in God's time.

We're not afraid of any man. What harm can any man do to us if we're doing the will of God and living "in the shadow of the Almighty" (Psalms 91:1). The Bible asks, "Who can harm you?" (1 Peter 3:13). God is able to make all that people do to us, work together for our good (Romans 8:28). Since that is true, why should we ever fear?

If we believe this, it will bring such tremendous authority into our lives. A lot of our spiritual authority is taken away from us by Satan, because we fear men, or seek to please them or impress them, or justify ourselves before them. We must get rid of these attitudes totally. But this is not easy. It's a constant battle. Once you've decided to stop trying to please A, B and C in one group, you may imagine that you've finished with seeking to please men. But very soon you'll find that you're trying to please D, E and F in some other group! And this is endless! We've got to fight this battle faithfully until the very end, if we want to break free from ALL men. We must be constantly on the alert against this sin and battle it. We must never seek for the approval of any man.

There are some believers who haughtily say that they don't care for anybody's opinion. But such people are not spiritual. They're just arrogant. The opinion of a godly elder brother can be very valuable. He will be able to tell us things that he sees in us that we can't see ourselves. To respect

and honour such a man and to be submissive to his authority can actually help us a lot. The important thing is to learn how to submit to a godly man, without becoming his slave.

If we want our church-members to fear only God and to be free from the fear of men and demons, then we must be like that ourselves, first.

It is because God is in control of everything on this earth that we don't fear anyone or anything.

Once, when I was planing to go to a certain country (where preaching the gospel is forbidden), the Lord reminded me of Matthew 28:18-19. I saw then, that it was because the Lord has all authority in heaven and on earth, that He has commanded us to go to every nation and make disciples. If we don't go forth on that basis, we'll face problems wherever we go. The word "therefore" is the most important word in the great commission in Matthew 28:1-20. Most preachers emphasise the word "Go". That's good. But on what basis are we to go? On the basis of our Lord having total authority over all people on this earth and over all demons as well. If you don't really believe that, then it's better that you don't go anywhere! This verse in Matthew 28:1-20 came to me as a new revelation at that time. Then I realised that I could go to that country without any hesitation. There were fears within me - naturally - when I entered that country. But I didn't take my decision on the basis of those fears.

If you think there's some nation in this world where the Lord Jesus does NOT have total authority, then I'd advice you not to go there! I would not go there myself. I'd be scared. But thank God there's no such place anywhere on this earth! Every corner of this earth is under the authority of our Lord. In the same way, if you think there's some man somewhere (however powerful he may be), over whom our Lord doesn't have authority, then you'll have to live in fear of him always. But thank God there's no such person anywhere. Our Lord has authority over every single human being. Even King Nebuchadnezzar understood that - as we read in Daniel 4:35.

If there's some demon somewhere who was not conquered by our Lord on Calvary, but who somehow escaped defeat, then we must live in fear of that demon always. But there's no demon like that who was not defeated on the cross. Satan himself was defeated there - permanently. That's what delivers us from all fear of Satan and his demons, and gives us great boldness in our ministry. So we go wherever God calls us to go. There may be risks in some places. But to the best of our knowledge, if we feel the Lord is leading us there, then we need not fear to go. The question is not whether there is persecution of Christians in a particular place or not. The only question is whether the Lord has asked us to go there or not. If He has, then His authority will back us up totally. We need have no fear whatsoever. But if God has not called us to go somewhere, then we should not go, no matter how much men may try and persuade us to go, or how much the spirit of adventure within us makes us want to go!

We must ask ourselves why we're going to a particular place. If we're going because we want to make disciples, and have no other ambition, then we can be certain that the Lord will be with us always - "even unto the end of the age", as He promised. But we may have other motives. The Lord "examines our heart's attitude" (Jeremiah 12:3) and tests our motives. The Lord won't commit Himself to everyone who calls himself a believer. We read that in John 2:24. But if you can honestly say to the Lord: "Lord, I'm going to this place only because I feel You've called me to go there. And I'm going there only to make disciples, to baptize them in the name of the Father, Son

and the Holy Spirit and to teach them to do everything that You have commanded. I'm not going there to make money or to get a name for myself or for any other personal reason" – if you can say that honestly, then you'll certainly have the Lord's authority backing you always. And then you won't have to live in fear, wondering what will happen to your wife and children or how your financial needs will be met. The only question that is important is "Has God called you or not?" Is God sending you there or is some man sending you there? Or is it the spirit of adventure that's driving you?

If you've got some program other than God's program, then I can't offer you a single promise from Scripture to comfort you. But if Your program is the same as God's program - to make disciples, baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit and teach them to do everything Jesus commanded – then I can assure you, you don't have to fear men or demons.

Every servant of God must know how to deliver those who are possessed by demons – by exercising the authority there is in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Demons aren't afraid of you or me. They're only afraid of the Lord, Who defeated them on the cross. That's why it's important to know clearly that Jesus Christ took away all of Satan's power on the cross (Colossians 2:14-15). This is the good news of the gospel that we must experience first of all and then proclaim to all men. If we believe it, we can deliver others from Satan's power.

We should not be afraid of what demons may try and do to us – because they cannot touch a hair on our heads without God's permission. But many believers in India are afraid that someone may do some witchcraft on them some day. Why do they have such fears? Because they do not know that Satan was defeated on the cross.

I remember meeting a pastor once who had been sick for a long time, who blamed his sickness on witchcraft that his enemies had done on him. How could that be? Is the Lord less powerful than the power of black magic and witchcraft? No. It was that pastor's unbelief that made him feel that way. No demonic power can stand against the authority and power of our Lord – either on earth or in the heavenlies where the demons operate from (Ephesians 6:12). If you don't believe that, I'd suggest that you stop serving the Lord and go and do something else. Stop being a preacher because you'll transmit your fear and unbelief to others. Fear is Satan's weapon. Don't let him ever use it on you.

Demons may at times be permitted to harass a believer under the permissive will of God - as in the case of Job. God permitted a messenger of Satan to trouble even the apostle Paul (2 Corinthians 12:7). That was as irritating to Paul as a thorn in his body. It may have been a sickness or a person who troubled Paul continuously, wherever he went. If we have a thorn in our flesh and we can't pull it out ourselves, we should ask God to remove it. But God may at times say "No", as He said to Paul, if He sees that that thorn is accomplishing the greater purpose of keeping us humble. Satan was even permitted to hinder Paul from travelling to Thessalonica once. But Timothy could go instead and God's purposes were still fulfilled there (1 Thessalonians 2:18; 1 Thessalonians 3:2).

Let me emphasise this however, that a born-again Christian can never be possessed by a demon. Unfortunately, many preachers these days, are preaching the unScriptural doctrine that believers can be "demonized - and thus bringing many believers under fear and condemnation.

Such preachers cannot quote a single Scripture to justify their teaching. But they say that they've come across such cases in their experience. Thus they exalt their experience above the Word of God. This itself proves that they are wrong.

Christ and a demon can never dwell together in the same heart. Light and darkness cannot co-exist in one place. It is true that some of the Jews in the synagogues where Jesus preached, were demon-possessed. But we don't read of a single case of a born-again believer (after Acts 2:1-47), being demon-possessed. A Christian may be harassed from outside by demons, as Paul and Job were - but that too, only with God's permission. And if God permits such harassment, you can be absolutely sure, as in the cases of Job and Paul, that it will work for your spiritual benefit.

If ever you're in doubt as to whether someone is demon-possessed or not, just ask him to make these three confessions with his whole heart:

1. Jesus Christ is my Lord.
2. Jesus Christ came in the flesh and overcame sin.
3. Satan, you were defeated by the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. I don't belong to you any more.

Demon-possessed people will not be able to make these three confessions with their spirit.

Every time we're sick, we should pray to be healed. But we can tell the Lord that if He plans to bring some spiritual profit to us through the sickness and thus glorify His Name, then we will accept it joyfully.

Under the old covenant, God promised a long healthy life to all those who honoured their parents. What did that involve? It meant that God would watch over such children as they grew up, ensuring that no fatal accident or sickness came upon them. Did God keep a special watch over those children who honoured their parents? Yes. It was a real and meaningful promise that God kept. God controlled circumstances so that a child who honoured his parents lived long on the earth. In the same way, God can control the circumstances of our lives too, so that we don't die before we have finished doing God's will - whether that be at the age of 33 or at the age of 90.

Under the new covenant, we know that long life is not the greatest thing, but a life spent in doing the will of God, whether it be short or long. Jesus Himself lived only up to the age of 33, but He finished the task His Father gave Him.

David Brainerd lived to the age of 29 and Watchman Nee to the age of 70. The important thing however was that (as far as we know) each of them completed the task God had assigned them, before they left this earth. And God sovereignly controlled all the circumstances of their lives until then, so that no sickness or accident shortened their lives until their task on earth was done.

There are many germs and bacteria on this earth that invade our bodies. Some of them even have the potential to kill us! But God is powerful enough to control those germs so that they don't kill us.

God is powerful enough to control the drunken drivers on the roads so that they don't run us down and kill us either.

He watches over us every moment and never slumbers or sleeps. If we believe that, we'll be free from the fear of circumstances, fear of sicknesses, fear of accidents and from every other type of fear.

If you fear God, you really need fear nothing else.

02.12. CHAPTER 12 FREEING OTHERS FROM FEAR

CHAPTER 12 FREEING OTHERS FROM FEAR A spiritual leader will never use fear as a means to get people to submit to him. On the contrary, he will seek to deliver people from fear.

Fear is a weapon found only in Satan's armoury. Jesus came to deliver man from fear. Every spiritual leader has the same task.

It says in Hebrews 2:14 that Jesus "took flesh and blood so that He might deliver those who through the fear of death were subject to bondage and slavery all their life".

Romans 8:15 tells us that "we have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but the spirit of adoption as sons".

Here Paul contrasts the Holy Spirit Who makes us sons of God with the spirit of slavery that makes us fear. Fear always brings slavery. People all over the world live in fear. Unfortunately, believers also live in fear .

If a man can frighten you sufficiently, you will be his slave. This is the principle on which all cults operate. People with strong soul-power use the weapon of fear on people, threatening them that if ever they leave their group, something terrible will happen to them or to their families. This is sheer nonsense. But when people hear such threats again and again over a period of time, they begin to believe it and are scared to leave the cult. Even if they find everything wrong in their group, they will still stay on through fear. The leader may even be living in adultery. But cult-members will not dare to speak against him, out of fear. Such fear brings them into slavery.

Whenever a Christian leader uses the weapon of fear to frighten believers into submission to his authority, or to pay their tithes, or to do anything, he is using Satan's weapon.

We must never use the weapon of "fear" to make people do what we want them to do. If anyone uses this weapon, then any group he builds will only be a cult. In the true church of God, every brother and sister must be left totally free to make his own choices. We certainly need to discipline people in the church if they live in sin. But they must not be threatened with curses and judgment.

There are pastors who tell their congregations that if they don't pay their tithes to the church, they'll end up spending that money on doctors and hospital bills. This is sheer nonsense. We are called to deliver people from such fears. People must give their money joyfully and cheerfully - not under threat of punishment or judgment. God doesn't want any money from anyone that is extracted like that. And pastors who force money out of people will come under the judgment of God sooner or later.

Under the old covenant, people served God out of fear. In Deuteronomy 28:1-68, the Israelites were warned that if they didn't obey God's commandments, they'd be punished with poverty, sickness, madness and other evils. So they obeyed God – out of fear. Malachi told the Israelites that they would be cursed if they didn't pay their tithes (Malachi 3:10). But that was under the Law.

Jesus came to deliver us from such legalistic obedience. Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist prophesied of the new covenant age and said that we could now "serve God without fear" (Luke 1:74), in true reverence. Is there anything in your life that you do out of fear? Do you read the Bible each morning because you fear that some calamity may strike you if you don't read it? That is plain and simple superstition. And God certainly does not want you to read the Bible in that superstitious way! He wants you to know His intense love for you and to be free from all fear. The reason why God has cleansed us in the blood of Jesus - and justified us too - is so that we might never feel condemned by Satan at any time.

Any ministry that brings God's people under condemnation can never be from God. The Lord has come to set people free – not to bring them into more bondage.

Most believers are already suffering so much with their many problems. We don't have to give them more problems with condemnation when they come to the church meetings. They come to be delivered and helped – not scolded and condemned and sent home depressed. The Lord rejoices over His people with shouts of joy - and that's what we must proclaim to God's people. The whole purpose of praising the Lord in the meetings of the church is to celebrate His love for us and to rejoice in the fact that He delights in us and is happy with us. God forgave us, not because we were good, but because He loved us. He chose us in Christ, when there was nothing good in us. How much more He will love us now that we have repented?

Yet Satan has succeeded in producing more condemnation among God's children than among his own children. Actually it is Satan's children who should feel condemned, not us. But they live in a world of deception and live happily. But most of God's children - who should be among the happiest people in the world, live under feelings of condemnation and unworthiness. This is not humility but unbelief!

Many believers claim to be filled with the Holy Spirit but they are still slaves to fear. How can a person be filled with the Holy Spirit and still be a slave to fear? Some false prophet comes along and tells them that some calamity will come upon them – and they are immediately filled with fear. Then the false prophet collects money from them to pray for "God's protection over them" - and then moves on to visit some other family, to deceive them. We must beware of such false prophets. There are many false prophets roaming around the world today producing fear in people's minds.

Ten thousand false prophets may prophesy evil against us. But no evil can touch us. It will only rebound on them. We must teach our congregations this truth and make them bold. We can never have confidence before God or boldness before Satan if we have any type of fear! If we fear God, we need never fear anything else.

Fear is the devil's weapon. Anyone who uses "fear" in his ministry is in fellowship with Satan.

Jesus warned people about hell, but he never frightened them with scary stories and gruesome details of the place! And He didn't threaten His disciples who left him, with dire consequences. The Bible commands masters never to threaten their servants (Ephesians 6:9).

If fear is a weapon of the devil, how can we as servants of God ever use it. Yet there are multitudes of Christian leaders who use fear to control their flock.

Even if people call us by bad names, we must not pronounce judgment on them or threaten them with God's wrath. The Pharisees called Jesus the prince of devils. But in reply, Jesus did not threaten them but forgave them (Matthew 12:32). Let us follow His example. When we speak to people, we give forth a spirit with our words too. We may not be not aware of it, but it is there. If bad breath comes forth from our mouths, others can detect it each time we open our mouths, but we may not be aware of it ourselves! It is exactly the same with the odour that comes forth from our spirits!

We may preach on holiness but the spirit coming forth from us may not be holy.

We may speak on humility, but the spirit coming forth from us may not be humble! Two brothers may preach the same sermon on humility. One may have a humble spirit and communicate that spirit to his hearers. The other may have an arrogant spirit and he will communicate that - even though both sermons are the same! There's a lot of difference between these two preachers - and we must discern that. In the same way, we can transmit a spirit of fear to others, if we have fear within ourselves. We can also bring believers under condemnation by the way we preach God's Word to them. We may be sincere, but the spirit coming forth from us may be a spirit that brings people into bondage. The effectiveness of our message depends on the spirit that comes forth from our hearts, and not just the knowledge that comes forth from our understanding. We are communicating a life to others and not just a message.

If you're a slave to any type of fear, that spirit of fear will come forth from you and defile others to whom you speak, and they will also be bound by that spirit of fear. That's just like it is in the human body: If you're a carrier of a sickness in your blood stream, you will transmit that sickness to your children.

That's why it is important that we eliminate every fear from our life - fear of men, fear of Satan, fear of sickness, fear of death, fear of evil circumstances, fear of road-accidents, fear of poverty (in a poor country like ours that can be a very real fear), fear that our children may not get a good education or good jobs, and many other fears like that. The only thing that can drive out such fears from us, is the fear of God and faith in Him. If we fear God, we will not fear anything or anyone else.

If we trust in God, we know that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him and that He honours all who honour Him. When faith dwells in our hearts, fear cannot dwell there, even though we may have occasional moments of fear. The important question is what dominates our thinking: Is it fear or faith?

We must also ask ourselves if we ever try to dominate others, using the weapon of fear.

02.13. CHAPTER 13 HUMBLING ONESELF

CHAPTER 13 HUMBLING ONESELF A spiritual leader will always be ready to humble himself.

God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. If we humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, He will exalt us at the proper time (1 Peter 5:5-6). To be exalted does not mean that we become great men in this world or in Christendom and get the honour of men. It refers to spiritual exaltation, where we are given spiritual authority to fulfil all the will of God in our life and ministry. But such exaltation depends on our humbling ourselves.

We all know that the world is full of people who want to become bigger and bigger in the eyes of others. Every politician and every businessman wants to become bigger. Unfortunately those who call themselves servants of Christ also want to become bigger and bigger. They aspire to have grand titles like "Reverend Doctor" and to hold positions like "Chairman" of their organisations. Sadly, today's Christendom is no different from any corporation in the world!

Young believers today see their leaders standing in the spotlight like film stars, on large platforms in public meetings, living in expensive hotels and houses, and driving expensive cars. Not knowing much about God's ways they admire such leaders and look forward to the day when they too will reach those heights! They feel that such preachers must have been faithful for many years for God to reward them in this way! And they imagine that by being faithful, they too will one day stand on such platforms with the spotlight on them! When young men see preachers making lots of money with the gifts they receive from America and the Gulf countries, they look forward to the day when they too can be rich like them. The role model for these young men is not Jesus Christ but these wealthy, film-star-type preachers. This is the tragedy in Christendom today.

We need to demonstrate to our young people by our lives and teach them by our words that if we follow the Lord, we will not become wealthy or famous, but godly. At the same time, we'll be misunderstood, rejected and persecuted! But we'll be able to love those who hate us, and bless those who curse us. This is what we need to demonstrate to the next generation. If we don't do that, they will follow "another Jesus" – the one they see in today's carnal preachers. To humble ourselves under God's mighty hand means to accept joyfully all the circumstances that God sends into our lives. We allow those circumstances to humble us, so that we become smaller and God becomes greater. When we become smaller in people's eyes, then they won't live in dependence on us, but on the Lord. As a servant of the Lord, I'm more afraid of those who respect me highly than of those who criticise me. I find that some people respect me so much that they expect me to find God's will for them. I always answer, "No". I tell them, that it was only under the old covenant that people went to the prophets to find the will of God for them. Under the new covenant, every child of God (including the youngest) can go to God directly and know His will personally. In

Hebrews 8:11, this is specifically mentioned as one of the privileges that we have under the new covenant. Now we can all receive the Holy Spirit and He is our Guide. So I tell my brothers that I can advise them, but I will never find the will of God for them. I've emphasized this from the very

beginning of my ministry. The result is that today people in our churches know the Lord themselves, and do not lean on me. They are connected directly to Christ their Head. Thus the Body of Christ has been built in our midst through many years. This is the first principle of building Christ's Body: We must connect people to the Head and make them independent of us, as soon as possible.

We need to humble ourselves and repent deeply of our failure in this area, in the past. We must long that Christ will increase in us and that we will decrease. God leads us through many circumstances in our life to reduce us, so that Christ might increase in us. If we humble ourselves under those circumstances, then God's purpose will be fulfilled in us.

Humbling ourselves involves apologizing to all whom we've wronged. As servants of the Lord, we are to be servants of all people and must be willing to go under all of them to bless them. When we make mistakes, we must be quick to acknowledge them and to apologize where necessary. The only one who never makes a mistake is God.

I have told the Lord that I am willing to apologize to anyone under the sun – children, servants, beggars or anyone – and that I would never stand on my dignity or prestige in this matter. And I've done that - and God has blessed me.

Don't ever stand on a false sense of prestige and dignity before your flock. If you've done something wrong, apologize to them and say that you were wrong and that you're sorry for what you did. Their esteem and respect for you will only grow thereby and not become any less. Why should you pretend that you never make any mistakes?

I heard of a college student once who asked his professor a very difficult question. The professor said he could answer that in three words: "I don't know"! The student's esteem for the professor shot up that day, not only because he saw the professor's humility, but also because he saw his integrity, in not teaching anything that he did not know.

I've said it publicly to the people in my church that I'll be making mistakes until the end of my life because of one simple reason: I'm not God. As long as I live on this earth, I'm going to make mistakes. Hopefully, those mistakes won't be as foolish as the ones I made ten or twenty years ago, because I've learnt some lessons from those earlier mistakes. I've acquired some wisdom from my blunders. But I'm still not perfect.

Many of you here are married. You know how easy it is for you to hurt your wives accidentally, even when you don't intend to. You may say something with a good intention. But your wife may misunderstand what you meant. It could be the other way around too – where you misunderstand something your wife said. What must you do in such cases? Let me just say this: Peace can be restored much quicker in your home through an apology than through a laboured explanation of your motives, or through an analysis of whose fault it was!

Suppose you find yourself in a situation where your colleagues misunderstand you. It may be no use explaining matters to them, because they may not be willing to listen. What should you do in such a case, especially when you're perfectly innocent? Should you feel sorry for yourself? Not at all. Just make sure your conscience is clear before God and men and leave the matter with Him. That's all you've got to do. That is the policy I've followed for many years now and I've been really

blessed. I would recommend it to you too.

Anyone who serves the Lord is going to be the target of Satan's attacks. The more useful we are to God, the more we will be attacked by the enemy. We won't be able to avoid that. Satan will attack us through slander, false accusations and fabricated stories. And he will attack our wives and our children too.

Just think of the evil things that people said about Jesus in His lifetime, and that they say about Him even today. They called Him a glutton and a drunkard (Luke 7:34), a madman (Mark 3:21), demon-possessed (John 8:48) and the ruler of demons (Matthew 12:24) and many such wicked names. They said he was a heretic preaching doctrines contrary to what the Bible and Moses taught (John 9:29). That's how they drove people away from listening to the Lord. But He never bothered to reply to such people. He never answered a single personal accusation. We shouldn't either. Jesus answered only doctrinal questions. Today, people say even immoral things about our Lord. But God does not come down in judgment on them.

They called Paul a deceiver and a false prophet who belonged to a sect that was evil spoken of, everywhere (Acts 14:14;

Acts 28:22). Thus they kept people away from listening to Paul too.

It has been the same story throughout church history with every great man of God - with John Wesley, Charles Finney, William Booth, Watchman Nee and with every other true prophet of God.

Henry Suso was a man of God who lived in Germany, a few hundred years ago. He was a saintly man and a bachelor. He prayed often that the Lord would make him broken and humble like Jesus Himself was. This was how God answered his prayer. One day Suso heard a knock at his door. When he opened the door, he saw a strange woman standing there with a baby in her arms. He had never seen her before. She was an evil woman who was wanting to get rid of her newborn baby and decided that the best man to dump it on was Henry Suso. So she told him, in a voice loud enough for everyone in the street to hear, "Here is the fruit of your sin", and left the baby in Suso's arms and walked off. Suso was stunned. His reputation in the town had been shattered in a moment. He took the baby inside, knelt down and told the Lord, "Lord, you know I'm innocent. What must I do now?" The Lord replied, "Do what I did. Suffer for the sins of others". Suso accepted the word of the Lord and never justified himself before anyone. He brought up that child as his own. He was content that God knew the truth and he was willing for everyone else to misunderstand him. Many years later, the woman was convicted of her sin and came back to Suso's house and proclaimed to all the neighbours that Suso was innocent and that she had told a lie. But what had happened in the intervening years? Henry Suso's prayer had been answered. He had become broken and humble like his Master. God had been able to accomplish a work of sanctification in Suso's life, freeing him from man's opinion's so that God's opinion alone mattered to him thereafter. Are we willing to pay such a price in order to become like Jesus? Or do we still seek the honour of men?

God breaks us by allowing us to be misunderstood, misjudged, falsely accused and publicly humiliated. In all such circumstances, we must refuse to see the men who are harassing us. They may be our brothers or our enemies. It doesn't matter. Behind the hand of every Judas Iscariot, is our heavenly Father giving us a cup to drink. If we see the Father's hand in such situations, we'll

drink the cup joyfully, however bitter and painful it may be. But if we see only Judas, then we'll take out our sword (as Peter did) and cut off people's ears (or their reputations) or whatever. When we are attacked or falsely accused, God wants us to humble ourselves under His mighty hand. It's easy to do that once we see that it is God's hand there, and not man's.

During the past years, I've heard "believers" say all sorts of evil things about me and my teachings. They have also made false accusations against me and my family members and written articles and books against me. But the Lord has always told me never to reply to them. So I've kept quiet. As a result the Lord has done a great work of sanctification both in me and in my family-members! God makes evil to work for our good. In the Lord's own time I know He will clear away the clouds and make the sun to shine. But He is the One Who determines that time, not I (as we read in Acts 1:7). Until then, my task is to humble myself under His mighty hand. It is not my task to justify myself before anyone. Once I start doing that, I won't have time to do anything else. As Paul said about Alexander the coppersmith, the Lord Himself will repay our enemies one day according to their deeds (2 Timothy 4:14). So we can safely leave such matters of vengeance in His hands (Romans 12:19).

It is best to leave all matters with God. He knows what He is doing and He's got everything under His control. He's chiseling away at the rock to sculpture the likeness of Jesus in us. Some parts of the rock are very hard and He has to use false accusations and persecution to chisel out those parts. If we submit to His chiselling, we'll come forth in the end as Christlike men with spiritual authority. When Judas betrayed Jesus, Jesus could call him, "Friend", because He saw His Father's hand clearly. If we see the sovereignty of God in all our circumstances, it'll be easy to humble ourselves. And it'll be easy for God to exalt us at the proper time. God knows the right time to lift a pressure from our shoulders and to give us His authority. So let's wait for Him. No-one who waits for Him will ever be disappointed or put to shame (Isaiah 49:23). To be exalted, as I said earlier, doesn't mean that God will promote us in this world. He won't make us head up big Christian organizations either. Personally, I'm not interested in being the head of any organization, leave alone a big one. I just want to be a servant of the Lord and of people - doing exactly what the Lord tells me to do and taking responsibility for those whom He commits to me - whether that be ten people or ten thousand. God decides that number - not I. And I'm certainly not interested in having a title or a position in Christendom. I'm also not interested in exercising control over people or money or property. I want to stick to proclaiming the Word and serving others in this needy world.

Let us follow in Jesus' footsteps. Let people say whatever evil they want to, about us. If we honour God, He will one day honour us. If we're serious about following the Lord, we will find that God takes us through many painful experiences. But His purpose in all of them will be to free us from the opinions of men and from the chains that tie us down to earth - so that we can "mount up with wings like eagles" (Isaiah 40:31).

God will order our circumstances to so humble us before men, that we finally come to the place where we care only for His opinion. Then our spiritual authority will be really powerful. May it be so for all of us.

02.14. CHAPTER 14 THE PRIESTHOOD OF MELCHIZEDEK

CHAPTER 14 THE PRIESTHOOD OF MELCHIZEDEK A spiritual leader will be a priest according to the order of Melchizedek, as his Master was, before him (Hebrews 6:20, Hebrews 7:1-7). The priesthood of Melchizedek is very different from the priesthood of Levi (See Hebrews 7:1-28). The Levitical priesthood consisted of many rituals and external matters. The sons of Aaron were even told what type of underclothes to wear when they ministered before God (Leviticus 6:10; Leviticus 16:4)! But the priesthood of Melchizedek has nothing to do with clothes or rituals!

Melchizedek appears in only three verses in the entire Bible and yet our Lord is called a High Priest after his name (Genesis 14:18-20)! What did Melchizedek do that was so wonderful?

Abraham was returning from a battle where he had just defeated 14 kings and their armies and rescued his nephew Lot and his family, whom those kings had captured. Abraham was undoubtedly exhausted and certainly proud of his victory - because he had won the battle with just his 318 servants, none of whom were soldiers! He had also acquired a large amount of booty, which it was customary in those days for the victors in battle to share among themselves. No doubt, his 318 servants were looking forward to becoming rich thereby! So Abraham stood there that day, physically exhausted and facing the twin dangers of pride and covetousness. But he didn't have anyone to warn him about these dangers. He had only his 318 servants. Abraham was no doubt a great man of God but he was a lonely man too. He was as lonely as a lot of Christian leaders are today, who sit on top of organisational pyramids, with only "Yes-men" under them, and no-one to correct them or challenge them! Such men are easy targets for Satan, who picks them off one by one. But God cared for Abraham and spoke to another servant of His, to help him. Melchizedek met all three of Abraham's needs, without knowing anything about those needs, because He did what God told him to do.

First of all, he took some food for Abraham. Melchizedek was a sensible man! He wasn't one of those super-spiritual types who feel that spiritual people must be ascetics! He didn't tell Abraham to fast and pray but gave him a good meal!

Many years later, God did the same thing for Elijah, when he was exhausted and depressed. God sent an angel to him, not with "an exhortation", but with some nourishing food (1 Kings 19:5-8)!

That's a good example for us to follow – to take a meal for some tired, exhausted brother or sister. When a believer is depressed or discouraged, what he needs may be just some good food and not an exhortation – for he is not only spirit and soul, but body too. We mustn't forget that!

After giving him the food, Melchizedek helped Abraham spiritually too - not by preaching to him, but by praising God for Abraham's victory – in two brief sentences.

He said, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." (Genesis 14:19-20).

Melchizedek probably spent two hours feeding Abraham and his servants and then spent 15 seconds praising God. But in Melchizedek's brief expression of praise, Abraham realised two things.

First of all, Abraham realised that he belonged to a God Who owned the heavens and the earth. That delivered him from coveting the goods of the king of Sodom that he had just recovered. Even though Sodom's riches must have been considerable, since Sodom was a very wealthy place, Abraham now saw that all that booty was like worthless garbage compared to the heaven and earth that his God owned. Melchizedek helped Abraham to see clearly Whom he belonged to.

Notice Melchizedek's wisdom here. He didn't preach to Abraham saying, "The Lord has told me that you're getting covetous and I've come with a word from Him to warn you"! No. Beware of self-appointed "prophets" who always claim to have "a word from the Lord" for you! Such "prophets" are false prophets. Melchizedek just turned Abraham's attention away from the booty to God. And "the things of earth grew strangely dim" in Abraham's eyes. That is the way to help people. We can learn a lot from Melchizedek's gracious, indirect approach that delivered Abraham from a serious spiritual danger that he was facing.

Secondly, Abraham saw clearly that it was not he and his 318 servants who had defeated those kings, but God! That was another revelation - and that saved Abraham from pride. Again Melchizedek succeeded in turning Abraham's attention away from his victory to God! The best preacher is the one who can turn our attention away from ourselves and our accomplishments to the Lord Himself.

Melchizedek stands in stark contrast to Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar – the three self-righteous preachers who preached to Job! Those three were the "ancestors" of the Pharisees! Today, we have many "descendants" of the Pharisees in Christendom. What we need however are more Melchizedeks. And now we come to the best part of this story. Melchizedek disappeared after blessing Abraham. We never read of him again in the Bible. His name appears only as a type of Christ.

Melchizedek must have been praying in his tent that morning, when God spoke to him and told him what to do. He didn't know Abraham, but he knew God. And that was enough. God told him what to do and made him a blessing to many.

What a ministry we priests of Melchizedek's order are called to! We are to bless people, physically and spiritually - and then disappear before we are even thanked! Do you want people to think you are a great man of God or do you want them to know that you have a great God. Therein lies the difference between a religious ministry and a spiritual one. Therein lies the difference between the priesthood of Aaron and the priesthood of Melchizedek. Aaron constantly appeared before people and got honour from them. Melchizedek served people and disappeared! This is how Jesus Himself ministered during His earthly days. He went around meeting the spiritual and physical needs of people who were beaten in life's battles. And He never wanted anyone to advertise His healings. He never wanted to be known as a Healer. He never wanted to be a king. He came to serve others and to lay down His life for them. He didn't want to be famous. He didn't even want to prove to Herod, or Pilate, or Annas, or Caiaphas, that He was the Son of God, by appearing to any of them after His resurrection. He never appeared to a single one of the Pharisees or Sadducees

after His resurrection, because He didn't want to justify Himself before men. He knew that the opinions of men were fit only for the garbage bin!

Alas, where shall we find such preachers and leaders in Christendom today?

Just think what would happen if we began to live like Melchizedek, listening to God and seeking to know from Him what we should do, each day. It would be the most useful way any of us could live on this earth. The psalmist says, "Goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life" (Psalms 23:6). That is the way to live. Wherever we go, we must leave behind us some act or word of forgiveness and goodness. When Peter described the life and ministry of Jesus to Cornelius, he summed it up in one sentence in Acts 10:38 : "Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and He went about doing good and delivering those who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him". This is the result of being genuinely anointed with the Holy Spirit : God will be with us and we will go around blessing people and setting them free.

You couldn't come in contact with Jesus in His earthly days, without some good emanating from Him to you that would bless you – both spiritually and physically. The woman who had a haemorrhage for 12 years discovered that, when she touched the hem of His garment.

Aren't we too called to live such a life where those who come in touch with us are blessed - physically and spiritually?

We are all called to be priests according to the order of Melchizedek.

02.15. CHAPTER 15 AN EXAMPLE

CHAPTER 15 AN EXAMPLE A spiritual leader will be such an example to others, that he will be able to say to them, "Follow me as I follow Christ". He will seek to lead others to be connected to Christ alone as their Head.

Many Christian leaders, however, seek to attach believers to themselves. And they're happy when those believers are more attached to them than to other leaders. Such leaders then become like little "gods" to their flock. They misuse the Scriptural teaching on submission to elders for their own benefit. The Bible says that the Antichrist will one day sit in the temple of God and present himself to people as God (2 Thessalonians 2:4). The church is the temple of God and the apostle John said that there were people with the spirit of the antichrist in the churches, even in his days (1 John 2:18-19)! There are many more like that today.

Sin came into this universe when a created being wanted to go up and become bigger and more visible in the eyes of others and become like God. That's how Lucifer became Satan. We should never forget that. If ever we see that spirit within ourselves, we should recognise it for what it is – the spirit of Satan.

Salvation, on the other hand, came when the Son of God humbled Himself and became as invisible as possible. We shouldn't forget that either.

Sin came through the pride of Lucifer and salvation came through the humility of Jesus. When people see the way today's Christian leaders advertise themselves on public platforms and in their magazines, do you think they get a true picture of the self-effacing, humble Jesus? Not at all. The examples that today's younger believers need to see are humble, self-effacing men who seek to hide themselves and to be unknown, who don't want to be highly spoken of, and who do their work quietly and disappear. This is the ministry we should all covet.

Supposing you did a piece of work for the Lord and no-one knew that you had done it. That should excite you! On top of that, if someone else got the credit for what you did, that should excite you even more! If you're like that, you're truly a priest after the order of Melchizedek.

I remember as a young Christian, looking around at the Christian leaders and elders in the churches that I moved about in, in those days. I'm sorry to say that I didn't see this spirit of Jesus in any of them. I'm not judging them, because I'm not their judge. I'm only saying that I couldn't respect them as godly examples for me to follow.

We don't have to judge anyone. But we must be able to discern people. Immediately after Jesus spoke about not judging others, He told His disciples to be careful to discern the pigs, the dogs and the false prophets from others (Compare Matthew 7:1 with Matthew 7:6 and

Matthew 7:15). If we don't have discernment, we'll certainly be led astray by the dogs and the false prophets (See Php 3:2). So I didn't judge my elders, but I didn't see them as worthy examples to follow, because they didn't have the spirit of a servant, like Jesus had. They were not people who

wanted to wash the feet of the saints. It was then that I decided that I would look at Jesus alone, until I saw a Christian leader whose example also I could follow.

We have a very great responsibility to demonstrate to the next generation what Christlikeness really means. People who look at us – the way we live, preach and serve - should be able to see in us what it means to be a true servant of the Lord, in the style of the apostles and prophets of old, and not in the style of 20th-century film-star-like evangelists.

Whether we realise it or not, we're leaving behind us an image, wherever we go – an image that's going to remain in people's minds long after we've gone away and long after they have forgotten the messages that we preached to them. When Paul called the elders of the church in Ephesus to bid farewell to them, notice what he told them in Acts 20:17-35. He reminded them that he had been with them for three years (Acts 20:31) and that he had preached to them night and day. Three years is more than 1000 days. And so if Paul actually preached twice every day, as it seems to imply here, he must have preached over 2000 sermons there.

Ephesus was the place where they had once had a great revival and where Christians had burnt their old books of magic and witchcraft costing nearly half a million rupees. It was also the place where handkerchiefs that had touched Paul's body were used to heal the sick and deliver the demon-possessed. God did some amazing miracles through Paul in Ephesus on a scale that hadn't been seen anywhere else (See Acts 19:11-12, Acts 19:19). At the end of all this, what does Paul remind the elders of? Does he remind them of his sermons or the miracles? No. He tells them to remember the humble way he had lived among them, from the first day they had seen him (Acts 19:19). Even if they forgot his sermons, they could never forget how he lived among them. His life had made a permanent impact on them. They could never forget his compassion and his simplicity. They'd remember that he had worked hard with his own hands as a tentmaker to support himself and his coworkers – so that he would not be a burden to them and also to be an example to other Christian workers (Acts 19:34-35). They would never forget that during all those three years, Paul never desired money, or gifts, or even a new set of clothes, from any of them (Acts 19:33)!

Paul also reminded them how he had proclaimed the WHOLE counsel of God to them uncompromisingly (Acts 20:27). He hadn't been a man-pleaser, seeking popularity for himself. He had preached repentance and every other unpopular subject, if it was profitable for his hearers, even if some got offended thereby (Acts 20:20-21).

These are the things Paul pointed out to them

If you pastor a church for three years like Paul did at Ephesus, and then leave, what will your flock remember you for? Will they remember you as an impressive preacher or as a humble man of God who showed them by your life, what Jesus was like. Will they think of you as one who drew them closer to God and challenged them to be more Christlike or as one who taught them how to distribute tracts?

Whatever our gift or calling may be, it must flow from the inner spring of a Christlike life.

One who has the gift of healing must exercise it the way Jesus exercised it. Jesus was a humble Man Who lived simply, mingled freely with all people, had great compassion for the sick, and didn't

take any money from anyone, either before or after healing them. He healed people freely. But I have never met even one "healer" like that in my entire life. If you come across someone like that, please let me know, because I'd love to meet him. But I haven't met such a man yet.

Instead, I've met a lot of money-loving preachers who pretend to have the gift of healing and who deceive people with psychological tricks! The sad thing in all this is that undiscerning, young men follow these deceivers and begin to seek for such a ministry themselves! And thus the next generation is led astray too. This is what saddens me.

If we're called to an apostolic ministry, or a prophetic ministry, or an evangelistic ministry, or a shepherding ministry, or a teaching ministry, whatever ministry it be, we must exercise it in a Christ-like way. The Spirit of Christ must motivate us in every calling.

If you feel you're called of God to pastor a church, then do it the way Jesus would do it. And may the lasting impression you form on your flock be of a man who was radiant with the glory of Jesus.

Let me finally share a word about our past failures.

We cannot change our past. That part of our lives is over. We have all failed and we can only repent of our failures, confess them and ask the Lord to cleanse away our sins in His precious blood.

I have made many mistakes in my life. But I've also learnt many lessons from my mistakes. So all those failures of mine were not useless to me. I've also learnt many valuable lessons by studying the mistakes of others. Thus I can avoid committing those mistakes myself.

We may be ashamed of many things that we did in the past. But once we have repented and made restitution (where necessary), we can learn lessons from our past failures and put our past behind us forever.

We must never allow Satan to take us on a "guilt trip" or a "condemnation trip" because of our past failures. There is no condemnation for anyone who is in Christ. When God justifies us through Christ's blood (Romans 5:9), He looks at us thereafter, as if we had never sinned in our entire lives! We too must then see ourselves, as God sees us. So don't let Satan or anyone else tell you that you're useless just because you failed in the past. You are a valuable vessel in God's hand, because you have repented. You can live the rest of your life for the glory of God.

It is a tremendous privilege that we elders have to disciple young people, because they have their whole lives ahead of them. Think of the tremendous potential there is in each of the young people in our churches. Remember that Satan is out to get them. Before he gets them, we must get them for God and His kingdom. In the hearts of those young people, a struggle is going on. If the devil can't prevent them from being saved, he will want them at least to compromise. But God has placed you over them as a shepherd, to ensure that they become radical disciples of the Lord and not compromisers. So let me urge you to take your calling seriously. May the Lord help us all to fall on our faces in repentance and ask for His forgiveness for the dishonour we have brought on His Name in the past, by being such poor examples to the next generation of believers. May He help us to become humble, godly leaders of His people in the days to come. Amen.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

03.0.1. Amazing Facts

Amazing Facts by

Zac Poonen

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03.01. CHAPTER 1 AMAZING FACTS ABOUT THE UNIVERSE

CHAPTER 1 AMAZING FACTS ABOUT THE UNIVERSE

We are living in an age of scientific progress. In our generation we have seen man achieve some things that our forefathers considered impossible. The pace at which science is progressing is perpetually accelerating. It has been estimated that the entire scientific knowledge that man had acquired from the time of his creation to 1750 A.D. was doubled all of a sudden within a period of 150 years by 1900 A.D. The knowledge that was man's by 1900 A.D. doubled again and this time in just 50 years - by 1950 A.D. This knowledge doubled again in just 10 years - by 1960. It has been estimated that man's scientific knowledge has been doubling thereafter every two and half years.

Take for instance the speed of travel, as one indication of scientific advance. 200 years ago man traveled on horseback just like his primitive ancestors did thousands of years earlier. But by 1900, man could travel by advanced means of locomotion at about 80 kilometres per hour and this was considered a very fast speed in those days. By 1945, jet planes had come into the air and man was traveling at 1000 kilometres per hour. Today, man travels in space at over 40,000 kilometres per hour.

We say that space has been conquered because man has reached the moon; but we must not forget that the moon is just on the fringe of space. Space itself is so vast that it staggers our imagination. Let's have a look at the universe and at space! The average distance of the moon from the earth is about 400,000 kilometres. This is very small compared with the distance from the earth to the sun which is about 150 million kilometres. The distance of the sun looks quite considerable, but is actually quite negligible when compared with the distance of the nearest star. When calculating distances to the stars, ordinary units of measurement will not do, for they lead us into fantastically large figures. Scientists and astronomers therefore use the "light year" as the unit of measurement - that is, the distance that light travels in one year. Remember that light travels about 300,000 kilometres (or 7 times around the earth) in one second. So the distance that it travels in one year comes to over 9000 billion kilometres.

Let us consider the distances to some of the stars. The nearest star visible to the naked eye is a star called "Alpha Centauri" - which is four and a half light years away - that is, about 250,000 times the distance to the sun. This means that if you traveled at the speed of light, even though you would reach the moon in one and a half seconds and the sun in eight and a half minutes you would have to travel for four and a half years at that speed to reach "Alpha Centauri." To get a better idea of what this means, consider a scale model of the universe where the earth is represented by a grain of sand and the sun by a marble, 3 feet away from the earth. All the planets of our solar system would then come within a radius of 100 feet from the sun. But the nearest star would be 150 miles away from the earth on that scale model of the universe. The farthest star visible to the naked eye is in the Andromeda Galaxy, which is more than 1.5 million light years away. There are still more distant galaxies that are visible through telescopes, 6,500 million light

years away.

Now look at the sizes of some of the stars. They look so small that little children say "Twinkle, twinkle little star". The earth looks pretty large! It takes us many hours to get from one place to another on this earth. But the sun is so large that 1 million spheres the size of the earth could fit into it, if it were hollow. Yet even the sun is small compared to some stars. Some stars are so large that 500 million spheres the size of the sun could fit inside each of them if they were hollow. The star Betelgeuse, 520 light years from the earth, is one of the bright stars of the Orion belt. Its diameter is 500 million kilometres - which means that if it were hollow, the earth could comfortably revolve around the sun, **INSIDE THIS STAR**, in its normal orbit! (The earth's orbit around the sun being only 300 million kilometres in diameter).

Now consider the number of the stars. Our solar system is part of a galaxy called the "Milky Way". Astronomers have estimated that there are at least 100,000 million stars in this galaxy. The sun is just one such star. And the Milky way is just one galaxy among many. Astronomers tell us that there are at least 100 million galaxies in the part of space that telescopes can see. There are many more beyond.

Consider too the perfect precision with which these heavenly bodies move in their orbits. The best man-made watch is not more precise than the stars in the heavens. Surely there must be a Supreme Intelligence behind this universe, that created and planned each star and planet.

How vast is space! How small is man! One of the writers in the Bible wrote thus, "When I look up into the night skies and see the stars, I can't understand oh God why you should pay any attention to puny man". Yet, God the creator of this universe cares for each of us. This is the marvelous truth we learn in the Bible. The value of any article is not determined by its size. A millionaire may own acres of land. But his little child is more precious to him than all those large tracts of land. So with God. Space may be vast. The stars may be huge in their size. But God loves and cherishes man more than all of His creation. Man was created to be a son of God, to have fellowship with God. It is such a fellowship with God alone that can give meaning and purpose to man's existence.

We can see the greatness of God in creation. But the Bible reveals that this God is also One who loves us and cares for us.

03.02. CHAPTER 2 AMAZING FACTS ABOUT MAN

CHAPTER 2 AMAZING FACTS ABOUT MAN

Man is the crown of God's creation. Greater and more wonderful than the stars in the universe is the wonder of man himself. Look at our bodies first of all and see how wonderfully God has created them.

Doctors tell us that the human brain has 30 billion nerve-cells, each operating at a potential of nearly one-tenth of a volt of electricity. Those over 35 years of age lose 1000 of these nerve cells every day - and these cells are never replaced. Yet the main functions of the brain carry on till the end of life - even though there is a slight loss in the sensitivity of the five senses. Did you know, that each of our eyes has 130 million little rods for black and white vision and 7 million cones for colour vision? These are connected to the brain by 300,000 nerve fibres. The human eye can receive 1.5 million messages simultaneously! To duplicate the function of one eye, mechanically, it would require 250,000 television transmitters and receivers!

Consider the ear! The auditory nerve is only three-fourths of an inch long and has the diameter of an ordinary pencil-lead. But it has 30,000 electrical circuits within it. If we were to compare the human ear with a piano, whereas the piano key-board has 88 keys, the key-board of our inner ear has about 1100 within the same frequency range. In other words, it is so sensitive, that it can pick up 12 different tones between any two keys on the piano.

Now look at the heart and the blood-vessels. We don't usually think of them until they give us some trouble! But that heart which God has put within our bodies beats 40 million times every year, without any lubrication and without taking a vacation. Even though you didn't realize it, your heart beat within your body 100,000 times yesterday, pumping blood through 100,000 kilometers of blood-vessels from your head to your feet. Your body also produced more than 172 billion red blood-cells just yesterday to replace the damaged and worn out cells? Isn't it a miracle that you are alive today!

Consider the glands. The thyroid gland in our body requires only 1/5000th of a gram of iodine daily. Yet, if that microscopic amount had been lacking in you when you were a baby, you would certainly have been mentally retarded! The pituitary gland is even more wonderful. Its daily output of hormones weighs only one-millionth of a gram. Yet even a slight increase or decrease in this output in a person, in his growing years, would make him physically and mentally abnormal! The reason we're healthy today is because the intricate working of our body-mechanism has been so perfect.

Truly as one Bible writer has said, "I will praise you Oh God, for I am wonderfully made!". The construction of the human body and the perfect balance that God has planned in it is indeed amazing. Of course, some of these marvels found in the human body are found in the bodies of animals too. But then, man has a soul inside his body. A soul which constitutes his personality and that consists of his mind, his emotions and his will - a mind that thinks and reasons, emotions that

make us feel, and will-power that enables us to make decisions. Animals have brains, but cannot reason. Man can think, put down his thinking in writing and thus pass on his knowledge to future generations - something animals can never do. (Birds still make their nests just like their ancestors did, thousands of years ago). Man's intellect is a part of God's image within him. It is a small bit of that supreme intelligence that is found in God. But there is yet more to man. Man has not only a wonderful body and an even more wonderful soul. He has something far deeper and more wonderful than even his body and soul - a spirit. This distinguishes man from all the rest of creation on earth. This spirit in the deepest part of our being tells us that there is a God - a Supreme Being to whom we are morally accountable. It is not only the wonders of creation that teach us that there is a God. The spirit within us also tells us the same thing.

It is neither civilization nor education that teaches us that there is a God. It is not even religion. If you visited uncivilized people in the jungles of this world, you would find even among those barbarians a sense of God. They worship some object or the other because there is a spirit within them that tells them that there is a Supreme Being to whom they are accountable. They have a conscience within them that convicts them of wrong done. No animal has such innate feelings of guilt. You can train an animal to feel guilt; but no animal automatically feels guilt. Only man feels moral guilt because he alone has a spirit and a conscience. This is why all over the world people have some form of religion. But you never come across a religious monkey or a religious dog!

Man was created for something beyond his life's span on earth. God has placed within each of us a longing for something higher and greater than we can ever get on earth.

Man is a creature of eternity. Evolutionists may say that there is no difference between men and animals. Yet in every country, the law recognizes that killing a baby is a far greater crime than killing an elephant. An elephant may be huge, but a small baby is far more precious because it is made in the image of God. Man is the crown of God's creation. He was created to have fellowship with God. (See Appendix for more facts about evolution).

03.03. CHAPTER 3 AMAZING FACTS ABOUT TRUE REVOLUTION

CHAPTER 3 AMAZING FACTS ABOUT TRUE REVOLUTION

There is a spirit of dissatisfaction in the world today - particularly among young people. There is a desire to overthrow the existing order and to seek for something better. Revolution is a popular word in our day. Revolution means change. We live in a day when there are social changes, economic changes and political changes. Fashions too change so rapidly. What is in fashion one year is not in fashion in the next. Even in the business world there is revolution. 65% of all products that are available in the world market today did not exist 5 years ago.

There is change all around us. People are seeking for something better. There is armed revolution in many countries. Yet, in spite of all this, things are only going from bad to worse. The newspapers are filled with news of famines and starvation-deaths, unemployment and violence, war and destruction. To be dissatisfied with the existing state of affairs is not bad, if we are seeking the best for our community. Certainly we want better living conditions for our people. We want the people of our country and the people of the world to be free from want, each having a place to live in, clothes to wear and food to eat. We want the people of our country and of the world to enjoy greater liberty and freedom. In fact, being content with the state of affairs and being silent about it is often a mark of death. Only dead people are content with the status quo. There is no revolution in a graveyard! But then there is no progress there either!

We may be living in a free country. But do we know true liberty in our personal lives? Man has progressed scientifically, but retarded morally. Most countries in the world are independent today; but man himself is still in bondage. He is unable to conquer his selfishness and his base passions even though he has external freedom. The Bible says, "It is better to control one's passions than to rule a country."

Revolution involves an overthrowing of the existing order. In this sense, Jesus Christ was the greatest revolutionary this world has ever seen. The only difference being that whereas other revolutionaries taught external revolution, Jesus Christ taught an inward one. Christ hit the root of the problem and taught that what man needed was a revolution that took place within him. When man experiences this internal revolution, then the external will take care of itself. We need to deal with the root cause of the problem first. A doctor when treating a patient, does not treat the external symptoms alone. He treats the disease itself. For example, a man suffering from cancer may complain of a lack of appetite. A doctor would be quite foolish if he treats the man merely for lack of appetite, without treating the cancer. And those who think of external revolution as the solution to our problems, are making the same mistake. They are trying to get rid of the symptoms. But the disease itself still remains.

What is the existing order within man which needs to be overthrown? Man today lives a self independent of God. Even religious men seek their own in so many ways. God does not enter into their reckoning when they plan their lives. To overthrow this order means to come to the place

where man lives in dependence upon God. This is the spiritual revolution that Jesus Christ came to bring. And this is what many are experiencing today, throughout the world.

Consider another area where we need revolution. All of us have inherited a religion from our parents. Along with that religion we have inherited certain prejudices that we have developed and built up through the years. In matters of religion, unfortunately, most men do not think for themselves. They have a priest or a pastor to do their thinking for them. Yet thinking on spiritual matters is the most fruitful activity that any man can engage in. We must determine to know the truth about God accurately. We cannot afford to be mistaken in this matter.

Consider how things would have been if man had refused to think for himself in the realm of science. If men had always accepted what their forefathers had believed there would have been no progress in the realm of science at all.

Here's one example: For thousands of years, men believed that the earth was the centre of the universe, and that the sun and stars revolved around it. But 450 years ago, a man named Copernicus questioned what all his forefathers had believed and proved them to be wrong.

Science is progressing, because scientists do not blindly accept what their forefathers believed. A century ago people believed that there could be no such thing as a flying machine. Today, people travel all over the world in aeroplanes. At the beginning of this century nobody believed that an atom could be split. Today, the atom has been split. A few years ago no one believed that man would ever land on the moon; but man has landed on the moon too.

It is only in the realm of religion, alas, that people blindly accept what their parents or priests have taught them. What about you? What are your religious convictions? Are they merely what you have blindly inherited from your forefathers? Or do you have convictions of your own, concerning God and eternity, that you have thrashed out in your own mind, and are now sure of?

Jesus Christ was the greatest revolutionary the world has seen, because He came to change men from the inside. And when man is changed on the inside, the ills of the world and of society will be remedied too. Not before then. Until man himself has been changed, there is no solution to the problems that face our world and society.

03.04. CHAPTER 4 AMAZING FACTS ABOUT OUR GREATEST NEED

CHAPTER 4 AMAZING FACTS ABOUT OUR GREATEST NEED What is man's greatest need? Have you ever thought about that? Is it food or shelter or employment?

There is no doubt that we need all these. Without them we could not exist. We need food for our bodies, we need clothing to wear, we need shelter and we need employment to support ourselves and our families. We cannot devalue the importance of any of these. But in the materialistic age in which we live today, man's great danger is forgetting that he is not a creature of time, but of eternity - that within his body there dwells a spirit, which in terms of relative values is far more important than the body. The body and its needs are important, but the spirit and its needs are far more important.

If you had a pet dog in your house that became sick, you would take it to the veterinary doctor and get it treated. But if you had a sick child at home at the same time and you had to choose between taking the child or the dog to the doctor, you would certainly take your child first. Not because your dog is not important, but because your child is more important. In just the same way, the spirit within us is far more important than our body. Have you ever considered the matter of your spirit's needs, with an unprejudiced mind? Prejudice is a deadly thing that blinds people's minds and prevents them from coming to a true understanding of God, a true understanding of their spiritual need and a true understanding of the reason for their existence on earth. Many live with unsolved problems all their lives because they have approached life with preconceived ideas and prejudices. Are you willing to approach the truth concerning religion and eternity with an open mind? You may find that some facts are different from what you have always believed to be true. But before we proceed further, do you really want to know the truth at any cost? If you are in dead earnest, you can know the truth. Not otherwise. The Bible says that God rewards those who diligently seek Him. Any man, woman or child, from any religion, can know the truth about God and Jesus Christ, if he seeks it with an open mind and with all his heart.

What happens to a man when he dies? Is death a cessation of all existence? No. Life on earth is an introduction to eternity. We are on probation here on earth and God is watching us. Our life here on earth is going to determine what our eternity is going to be like. God knows the real truth about each of our lives. We may fool our friends about our goodness, but we can't fool God. In God's eyes all are guilty for we have all come short of His high and holy standards. Man was created to have fellowship with God. If he doesn't have this, he has failed to fulfill the primary purpose of his existence on earth. This fellowship with God can never be enjoyed till the guilt of his sin is removed.

What do we consider God to be like? People in the world have different ideas about God. But no one has ever seen God at anytime. And so all our own ideas about God are useless. The Bible says that Jesus Christ came down to earth from Heaven and revealed God to man. He was God manifest in human form. Here is the truth: Jesus Christ revealed God, as a God full of holiness and full of love.

How can the guilt of our sin be removed from our lives? Many people have a great problem with guilt in their lives? They do not find a solution. But there is an answer in Jesus Christ! What is it?

It is not enough merely to repent and feel sorry. If I were convicted in court of a bank robbery and my father were the judge, he could not let me go just because I was sorry for what I had done. He may love me as my father but he sits there in court as a judge. And so he has to punish me for the crime that I've committed, even if I am sorry and even if he loves me as his son.

If we believe in a God who is just, we must surely recognize that He must be more just than human beings. How then can He let us off merely because we are sorry or merely because He loves us? He is perfectly just; and justice demands punishment. But my father can do something in court that could help me. He could fine me the full penalty of the law and say - "You are fined Rs.100,000/-". He could then take Rs.100,000/- of his own hard-earned money and give it to me saying - "Son, here's the money! Go, pay your fine and be free!" Do you see what he has done? As a judge he punished me and as a father he paid the punishment himself. This is what God has done. He says to all mankind - "You are guilty and the punishment you deserve is death." As a Judge He punishes us. But then He also loves us and so came down in the person of Jesus Christ and paid that punishment Himself. This is why Christ died - to pay the penalty for our guilt. The proof that this is true lies in the fact that Christ came out alive from the grave, three days after He had died. Jesus Christ overcame death. He is living today.

These are facts for us to believe. But there is something for us to DO as well. When my father offers me the money in the court, if I don't receive it from his hand, I cannot go free. Similarly the pardon that God offers us in Jesus Christ has to be received. If we don't accept it, we can never benefit from it. God offers you pardon in Jesus Christ today. But you have to choose to receive it.

03.05. CHAPTER 5 AMAZING FACTS ABOUT ADDICTION AND FRUSTRATION

CHAPTER 5 AMAZING FACTS ABOUT ADDICTION AND FRUSTRATION People all over the world are chasing after one or more of four things: PLEASURE, FAME, WEALTH and POWER. But there is a law connected with these that we would all do well to know in advance. We could call it the law of diminishing returns.

Take for instance, the pursuit of pleasure as an example, to understand how this law operates. Initially, a pleasure gives quite a bit of satisfaction, when indulged in, in small doses - whether that pleasure be from tobacco, alcoholic drinks, rock-music, drugs, pornography or illegitimate sex. But once indulged in, these things begin to tighten their grip on their victim, until he becomes an addict, unable to live without the stimulation of that pleasure. But further, the addict gradually finds each time, that the dose of the stimulant that he took on previous occasions does not give him the same degree of satisfaction now as it did previously. He needs to take a greater dose now to get the same degree of pleasure. This is the law of diminishing returns. In the case of addiction to alcohol and drugs, the body and mind of the individual are finally ruined. In the case of addiction to pornography and sex, the addict goes on from normal sex to perversions and thus becomes subhuman and in some cases even worse than the animals. In each case, the victim finds himself gripped as in a carpenter's vice, unable to extricate himself.

Even the pursuit of the more refined forms of pleasure - such as the pleasure that comes from some accomplishment in the realms of science or music - does not fully satisfy; this too being subject to the law of diminishing returns. This law operates in exactly the same way in the pursuit of fame, wealth and power as well - making addicts and ruining them - though perhaps in less ugly ways than the drug addict or sex-addict.

Consider the pursuit of fame. In school-days, this begins with just seeking to be popular with one's friends. Then the pursuit of fame continues - whether in the field of athletics, cinema, sport, or whatever - from one degree to another. One who achieves city-wide fame now looks for nation-wide fame and then for world-wide fame. In this pursuit, the person may develop ulcers in his stomach, compromise his convictions and even climb on the shoulders of others, ruining them, in order to get to the top himself. And what is his reward at the end of it all? With nothing more to conquer he is frustrated. Many film stars and other famous people have committed suicide because of their inner frustrations, despite their popularity.

Consider how this law operates in the pursuit of wealth. Initially, a man may start a business enterprise purely with the aim of earning a living. But gradually the accumulation of profits beyond his family's needs, leads him to think in terms of the expansion of his business empire. Thus begins a heated chase after wealth that never ends - for although this world has enough material resources to meet every man's needs, it does not have enough to satisfy even one man's GREED. Money and material things have a power to grip a man and to give him less and less satisfaction in life.

The accumulation of material things, which a man once thought would make his life and his home happy now ceases to bring happiness. The law of diminishing returns operates here too. The electronic gadgets, the rich food, the thrill of traveling and seeing places, the high society life, etc., which he has attained through the accumulation of wealth, now satisfy him less and less. There is something hollow and empty about them all. He finds that he was happier and less tense when he had less wealth. His marital happiness, he finds, has also decreased. Thus the words of the Lord Jesus Christ are proved true, "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of things that he possesses".

Consider, how this law operates in the pursuit of power and positions of honour too - whether in politics or in any other realm. In politics, for example, a man who once longed just to be elected as a Member of Parliament, now finds that he is not satisfied. He now has his eyes on a ministership. He will find at last that even if he attained the highest position in the country, he would still be frustrated and uneasy. As the old saying goes, "Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown." He was not in danger of being assassinated when he was unknown!

Why is it thus in all these realms?

Within each of us there is a vacuum that can be filled only by God. Man is constantly seeking to fill that vacuum with pleasure, fame, wealth or power. But it is a futile pursuit. The ultimate result is always frustration because we are never satisfied. The Bible says that God has placed eternity in man's heart. Someone has expressed it like this: "Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in God." The law of diminishing returns is a law that God Himself has placed upon the pursuit of all that is great and attractive in this world, so that man will realize that he is a creature of eternity. He has been made with a spiritual vacuum that cannot be filled apart from the Holy Spirit of God. But just as a cup needs to be clean before it is filled with anything worth drinking, so too our heart needs to be cleansed from sin before it can be filled with the Spirit of God. Christ died for our sins, so that our hearts might be cleansed from sin and made pure.

True and lasting satisfaction that overcomes all unrest in our hearts can be found only as we acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord over every area of our life.

03.06. CHAPTER 6 AMAZING FACTS ABOUT THE FINAL JUDGMENT

CHAPTER 6 AMAZING FACTS ABOUT THE FINAL JUDGMENT

Life on this earth is not everything. Our life is a countdown to death. Day by day the count goes down to the day when we shall finally end up in the grave. And at death, like the space rocket, we take off. What is death? It is a separation of our soul and spirit from the body. The important question at that time is "Where are we going"? Do you know your destination?

Life after death is more important than life on earth. Eternity is more important than time. Where we are going to spend eternity is far more important than where and how we spend our lives on earth. The foolish person is short-sighted and thinks only in terms of this life. The wise person looks to the future and prepares for eternity.

Consider as an illustration, a young man who has inherited a fortune of many millions of rupees and who has decided to settle down in Bangalore. On his way there he spends a couple of days in Bombay. He spends money lavishly on himself during those two days and gambles and loses his fortune completely. When he finally reaches Bangalore, he is penniless and spends the remaining sixty years of his life begging on the streets of the city, with no place to stay.

What would you call such a man? Surely, "A fool". A far greater fool is the one who thinks only in terms of this life and neglects eternity. For the length of our life on earth, even if it be a hundred years, is only a fraction of a second when compared to eternity. The Bible says that a day is coming when each of us will have to give an account of our earthly lives to God. When we consider all the billions of people who have lived on this earth during the many centuries of man's history, we may wonder how God keeps a record of everything that every man did, said and thought, during his lifetime. This record is kept by each man's memory.

Memory is like a video-tape that faithfully records everything that we do, say and think. It also records our inner attitudes and motives. When a person dies, although he leaves his body behind on earth, his memory being a part of his soul, goes with his soul to the place of dead spirits. When the day of judgment finally comes, he will stand before God to give an account to Him of his entire life on earth. In that day, when each person's turn comes for judgment, God will only have to replay the video-tape of the man's own memory for everyone to see the record of his life. No-one will be able to question the accuracy of that display for it will be his own memory recounting the details of his earthly life. The outward veneer of decency and religion that people wear today will be stripped off in that day and the true inner person will then be exposed. Religion will not save anyone in that day, for it will be clearly seen that all have sinned - whatever religion they may have been born into or practiced. Good works done, money given to the poor or to church, temple or mosque also will not save anyone - for none of these religious activities can blot out the record of our sins.

There is ONLY ONE WAY by which the record of the evils that we have done, said and thought can be permanently blotted out from God's sight, so that they will not be played back by the

video-tape in the day of judgment. Our good works cannot blot out our evil works. No. A just and righteous punishment has to be meted out for the sins that we have committed. The Bible says that there is only one punishment laid down in the Divine Law for sin - and that is ETERNAL DEATH. This death is what we all deserve for our sins.

It was to save us from this punishment that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came down from heaven, to earth as a man and died on a cross outside Jerusalem, over 1950 years ago. There He took the Divine punishment for the sins of humanity - for all the sins of people of all religions. He was buried in a nearby grave. But three days later He came out alive from the dead, proving that He was indeed the Son of God, and that He could conquer death - man's greatest enemy. Forty days later, while many were watching Him, He ascended up into heaven, promising to return to earth again at the appointed time to judge all men. Over 1950 years have passed by since He gave that promise and now the time of His return to earth has drawn near. One of these days we shall see Him return in the skies from heaven.

Jesus Christ was the ONLY ONE in history to die for the sins of the human race. He is also the ONLY ONE to rise again from the dead. In these two matters He is unique.

Today, our sins can be forgiven and erased from that video-tape, if we sincerely turn from our sins and repent of them, asking God to forgive us for Jesus Christ's sake, believing that He died for our sins and rose again from the dead. But that's not all. There is more that God offers us. He also promises to come and live in our hearts by His Spirit and to give us the power to overcome our sinful habits so that the record in the video-tape of our memory, in the coming days, can be one of purity, holiness and goodness. This is the ONLY WAY of salvation that God has appointed for the human race. Remember that the only other alternative you have, is to face the record of your sins played back by the video-tape of your memory, on the day of judgment. Knowing this truth and realizing the seriousness of eternal judgment in a lake of fire for all sinners, it becomes our duty to lovingly warn everyone of the only way of escape.

03.07. CHAPTER 7 AMAZING FACTS FROM HISTORY'S GREATEST EVENT

CHAPTER 7 AMAZING FACTS FROM HISTORY'S GREATEST EVENT The death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ are the two most important events in the history of the world. They are also the two central facts on which the Christian faith is founded.

There are at least four clear truths that we can learn from the death of Christ on the cross of Calvary:

1. There is a life after death

If this life were everything, Jesus Christ would never have died. He had Divine power and could easily have escaped from the hands of His enemies had He wanted to. He need not have handed Himself over to them willingly to be crucified by them. The reality of life after death and of the immediate entry of the soul at death into the eternal state is also revealed in the words of Jesus to a thief who was crucified with Him, "Today you will be with Me in paradise". Jesus and that repentant thief entered paradise that very day.

These words of Jesus have validity because Jesus came back from the dead after three days. That was the clearest proof that what Jesus had said about death and about life after death were literally true.

Remember, there is a life after death which is more important than this one.

2. God is Holy

A second lesson we learn from the death of Christ is the fact that God is infinitely and absolutely Holy and can never tolerate sin. On the cross, we see that when the sin of the world was placed on Jesus Christ the sinless Son of God, God turned His face away from Him and forsook Him, because God could not look upon sin. As the Bible says, "God's eyes are too pure to look at evil". The judgment of God fell even upon His beloved Son, when He bore the sins of the world. God's love does not make Him overlook sin. This teaches us something of the horribleness of sin in God's eyes. God may love you greatly, but if there is sin in your life, He will just as surely forsake you as He forsook His Son on the cross of Calvary. Many have the idea that because God loves them, He will overlook sin in their lives. But don't forget that sin is sin, no matter in whom it is found.

God is like a consuming fire. Those with sin in their lives will be consumed by Him. The mere fact that we are better than others in our own eyes will be of no value in that day when we stand before a Holy God to give an account of our lives to Him. Sin is worse than leprosy, cancer of insanity. It can destroy us for eternity.

3. God is Love

A third lesson we learn from the death of Christ is the fact that God is Infinitely Loving. The Love of God is seen not merely in kind words that He speaks to us or in kindness shown to us, but in the fact that He gave His Son to die, to save us from our sin and misery. There

is no greater manifestation of love on this earth than a man laying down his life for another.

Jesus Christ went through all the agony of crucifixion, only because He loved us and wanted to take the judgment for our sin and thus save us from it. He suffered physically, mentally and emotionally. Above all, He suffered spiritually when He was forsaken by the Father in Heaven.

All that agony that the Son of God went through on the cross is an indication of how greatly God loves and values man. In this world, man is cheap. But if you want to know your real value, you have got to look at the cross where Jesus the Son of God gave His life for you. That's how much God values you. The Bible compares God's love for man to that of a mother's love for her child. As a mother would long to take into herself any disease that her child has, so that her child can be free, so God took upon Himself the penalty of man's sin so that man might be free. The perfect holiness and perfect love of God meet at the Cross. Perfect holiness demanded that man be punished with death - the penalty for sin. Perfect love took man's place and took that death upon itself.

4. There is no other way of salvation A fourth truth that becomes crystal clear through Christ's death is the fact that there is no other way of salvation.

If any other way of salvation had been possible, God would have chosen that way and not allowed His beloved Son to suffer so much. If we could have gone to heaven and into God's presence merely by living a good life, then God would have been foolish to have permitted His Son to go through the agony of the cross unnecessarily.

We are not wiser than God. Infinite Wisdom could think of only one way to save man from his predicament without compromising the demands of Infinite Holiness and Infinite Justice. And even though that way meant suffering, Infinite Love was willing to tread that pathway to save man. To imagine that there can be some other way of salvation is to consider ourselves wiser than God, and is only an indication of the utter foolishness of our thinking. Have we understood what the death of Christ teaches us? If so, there can be only one adequate response from us - a complete yielding of our lives to Christ for time and for eternity. An intellectual acknowledgment alone is meaningless. The response of our will is our will is what God seeks.

03.08. CHAPTER 8 THE MOST AMAZING FACT

CHAPTER 8 THE MOST AMAZING FACT

We are all like people traveling in a desert, dying of thirst. If someone finds water somewhere, he will certainly want to inform others about it. He cannot compel them to drink. But he can point out the oasis to them. That's what we're doing too - pointing out where eternal life is available freely, to all who desire it. The most amazing truth in the world is that the greatest sinner can become a child of God - in a single moment, if he seeks God in earnest.

If you lose a 5-paisa coin while walking along the road one night, how long would you spend looking for it? Perhaps not even a minute! But if you had misplaced a bundle of one-hundred rupee notes somewhere, how long would you search for that? You would search until you found it. Many treat God like a 5-paisa coin. No wonder they don't find Him! He is far more valuable than that - far more than even a wad of one-hundred rupee notes, for that matter.

God doesn't want robots. He wants sons. That's why He has given us all a free will. We can choose either to obey Him or to disobey Him. It is through the exercise of this free will in disobedience to God that we have all gone astray. Sin has not only ruined our lives, it has destroyed our families as well. It makes us miserable on earth and will finally send us to hell for eternity. But now God invites us to repent (that is, to turn our backs to our sinful way of life and to turn towards God) so that we might receive a full and free pardon for all our past sins through the death of Jesus Christ.

God could have forced us to do this. He could have punished us with diseases every time we sinned until we were compelled to obey Him. But then we would have become robots and slaves - not sons. So He doesn't do that. He waits for us to turn from sin through our own choice.

Make that decision now. And you can become a child of God in a moment. You may not realize it, but this is a matter of life and death.

Why not pray this prayer to God right now:

"Lord Jesus Christ, I acknowledge that I am a sinner deserving judgment. Thank you for taking my punishment and dying for my sins, and for coming out alive from the grave after death. I really desire to give up my sinful way of life. Come into my heart, Lord Jesus. Cleanse me and help me to start a new life today. Give me your power so that I can live the rest of my life for your honour. Thank you for hearing my prayer." This will be the most important decision that you ever made in your life.

God bless you richly.

04.0.1. Beauty for Ashes

Beauty for Ashes by
Zac Poonen

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04.0.3. Dedication

To ANNIE my devoted helpmeet, who has faithfully stood behind the scenes and upheld me in my ministry. The mouth could not speak, neither could the hand write, if the heart did not pump the life-blood to them.

04.0.4. Table of Contents

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04.0.5. THIS BOOK AND YOU

THIS BOOK AND YOU

God had a great and glorious purpose for man when He created him. Of all created beings, man alone was created with the capacity to share in God's life and to partake of the Divine nature. But he could enjoy this privilege only as he voluntarily chose to live a life centered in God. The two trees in the garden of Eden were symbolic of two ways of living. Adam could either partake of the tree of life (which symbolized God Himself) and live by the Divine life, or else he could choose the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and thus develop his own self-life and live independently of God. As we all know, he chose the latter. Having descended from Adam, we all have this over-developed self-life now. But God's purpose for man did not change when Adam fell. The coming of Christ into the world was in order that we might be delivered from this self-centered life that we have inherited, and once again have the opportunity to partake of the tree of life. This is the abundant life that Christ offers us.

Isaiah had prophesied (Isaiah 61:1-3) that Christ, when He came, would set people free from bondage. Man is bound not only by the Devil but also by his self-life. Christ came to set us free from both. Isaiah said that Christ would give those He liberated, beauty to replace their ashes. Ashes are a most appropriate symbol of the self-life - picturing its ugliness and its uselessness. Christ offers to give us the beauty of His own life to replace the ashes of our self-life. What a privilege! Yet many Christians do not enjoy this fully. Why not?

How can we enjoy it? That is the subject of this book.

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We shall look at four characters from the Bible in the pages that follow; and each of them will have something to teach us.

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04.01. CHAPTER 1 THE CORRUPTION OF THE SELF-LIFE

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We can never enjoy deliverance from our self-life before we see something of its total corruption. Let us look at the elder son (in the parable in Luke 15:1-32), for he illustrates, perhaps better than anyone else in the Bible, the utter rottenness of the self-life. The younger son in the parable is usually considered the worse of the two boys. But as we look a little more carefully at the elder brother, we will discover that in God's eyes, he was just as bad, if not worse. True, he did not commit the same sins as his younger brother. But his heart was crooked and self-centered.

Man's total depravity The human heart is basically the same in every individual. When the Bible describes the human heart as deceitful above all things and desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9), it refers to every child of Adam. The refinements of civilization, lack of opportunity to commit sin and a sheltered upbringing may perhaps have kept us from falling into the grosser sins that some others have fallen into. But we cannot, on that count, consider ourselves better than they. For if we had had the same pressures they faced, we would have undoubtedly ended up committing the same sins. This may be a humiliating fact for us to acknowledge, but it is true. The sooner we recognize this fact, the sooner we shall experience deliverance. Paul recognized that no good thing dwelt in his flesh (Romans 7:18). That was his first step to freedom (Romans 8:2).

Men look on the outward appearance and call some good and others bad. But God Who looks at the heart sees all men in the same condition. The Bible teaches the total depravity of all men. Consider Romans 3:10-12, for example: "There is none righteous, (and just in case we think that is an overstatement, it continues to say), no, not one. There is none that understands, there is no-one who seeks after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable. There is no-one who does good, no, not one." Romans 3:10-20 is a summing-up of the guilt of all humanity - of the irreligious as well as the religious. In Romans 1:18-32 we have a description of "the younger son"-the externally immoral and godless man. In Romans 2:1-29, we have a portrayal of "the elder son" - the religious man who is just as bad a sinner. After having described these two categories of people, the Holy Spirit sums up the case by saying that both groups are alike guilty. There is no difference between one and the other.

Man is indeed totally depraved; and if God does not reach down and do something for him, there is certainly no hope for him.

Self-centeredness The elder son (Luke 15:25-32) can be taken to symbolize a Christian worker. If the father in the story is a type of God, it would be legitimate to consider the son as a type of an active Christian - for we see him in the parable coming home after a day's work in his father's fields. Here was no lazy young man, sitting at home and enjoying his father's wealth. Here was one who worked hard for his father, one who apparently loved his father more than his younger brother did - for after all, he did not leave home and waste his father's wealth, like the latter. He was apparently more devoted, but actually, as we shall see, just as selfish as his younger brother.

It is the picture of a believer active in the Lord's work and apparently full of devotion to his Lord but still centered in himself.

God created this world with certain laws built into it. If those laws are violated, there will be some form of loss or injury. Consider one law for example: God has ordained that the earth should revolve around the sun. If the earth had a will of its own and decided one day that it would no longer be centered in the sun, but would only revolve around itself, there would be no change of seasons and soon all life on earth would perish. Death would enter in. In the same way, Adam was created to be centered in God. The day he refused God as his Center and chose to be centered in himself - this is what was implied in his choosing to eat of the tree that God had forbidden - he died, as God had said he would.

There is a lesson here for us: In the measure in which our Christian life and service are centered in ourselves, in that measure we shall experience spiritual death - in spite of our being born again and in spite of our fundamentalism. And all unconsciously, we shall be ministering spiritual death to others too. We may have a reputation as keen and zealous workers for the Father (as the elder son perhaps had), but we may still merit the rebuke of the Lord, "I know your reputation as a live and active (Christian), but you are dead" (Revelation 3:1 -LB). This is a tragic but dangerous possibility in Christian work. Many a Christian worker lives on the reputation he has built up for himself. Looked up to by others, he is often unconscious of the fact, that God sees him in an altogether different light. Never having been delivered from self-centeredness himself, he is unable to deliver others - even if he preaches beautifully! And so, a warning is given for all of us in the story of the elder son.

Recognizing the evil within

God often allows times of pressure to come into our lives to bring up from within us our corrupt self-life, so that we begin to see ourselves as we really are. It is fairly easy for us to consider ourselves spiritual when our circumstances are easy. When we have no problems to tackle, when nobody is irritating us, when things are going smoothly and our co-workers are congenial, we can deceive ourselves concerning the real state of our hearts. But wait till we get a co-worker who irritates us, or a neighbor who annoys us all the time, and the veneer of spirituality disappears. Our self-life will then manifest itself in all its ugliness. This was what happened to the elder son. When his younger brother was honored, he got upset. No one would ever have thought that this elder son could have behaved so peevishly. He had appeared such a nice person all along. But he hadn't faced pressure like this before. Now, his real nature was manifested. It was not the provocation at that moment that made him evil. No. The provocation merely brought up to the surface what was within all the time.

Amy Carmichael has said, "A cup brimful of sweet water cannot spill even one drop of bitter water, however suddenly jolted". If bitter water comes out of our lives and our lips, it is because it has always been there. It is not the provocation or the irritation that make us bitter or unspiritual. They only bring out of us what is already within. And so it should make us deeply thankful to God that He allows such times to come upon our lives when we see the corruption of our own natures. If it were not for such occasions, we might never realize that there is a fountain of corruption within us, and that not one good thing dwells in our flesh. This also teaches us that suppression is not victory. One person may explode in anger in a trying situation, while another, with a little more

self-control, in a similar situation, may only boil inwardly, without any steam escaping through his lips! In men's eyes, the second person may have a reputation for meekness. But God Who sees the hearts knows that both men boiled within and considers them both equally bad. The difference in their external conduct was merely a result of different temperaments, which matter nothing to God.

If suppression were victory, then I think salesmen are among the most Christ-like people that I have ever met! No matter how much their customers tax their patience, they still retain a gracious attitude towards them, for the sake of their business - even though they may be boiling within!

No. Suppression is not victory. God does not want us to merely appear delivered and spiritual - but to be actually delivered. Paul said, "It is no longer I, but Christ Who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). This is the point to which God wants to bring us.

Let us look at the characteristics of the self-life in two aspects. First, its attitude to God, and secondly, its attitude to its fellowmen. We see both of these illustrated in the story of the elder son. The self-centered person's attitude to God

Legalism The attitude of the self-centered life to God and to His service is characterized by a spirit of legalism. Self can try to serve God. It can be very active in such service too - but it is always legalistic service. It seeks a reward for the service it offers to God. "I have served you all these years," the elder son tells the father, "but you never gave me a kid." He had served his father for reward all along, but it had not been evident until now. This moment of pressure brought out the truth. That is how self serves God - not freely, joyfully and spontaneously, but hoping for a return. The return expected may even be some spiritual blessing from God. But service done with even such a motive is legalistic and unacceptable to God. The elder son considered his father hard and cruel for not having rewarded his service during all those years. He was like the man who was given one talent, who came up to his master at reckoning time and said, "I've kept your talent safe [without trading it for profit], because I was afraid [you would demand my profits] for you are a hard man to deal with" (Luke 19:21 -LB). Self considers God to be so difficult to please, and so it strives and strives to do God's service and still condemns itself for not having satisfied the requirements of such a "demanding" God! That is not the type of service that God expects from any of us. The Bible says, "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). In the matter of service, too, God delights in one who serves cheerfully, neither grudgingly nor of necessity. He would rather have no service at all, than reluctant service. When one serves for reward, it is but a short while before he is complaining to God that he is not being blessed sufficiently. The matter becomes worse when someone else is more blessed than him. Do we ever compare our work and the blessing we receive with that of others? This can only be the result of legalistic service. Jesus once told a parable about some laborers who were employed at different hours of the day by a certain man. At the end of the day the master gave them each a denarius. Those who had worked longest came up to the master and complained saying, "How can you give us the same wages as these other people? We deserve more." These people had served for wages - and when they got what they had agreed for, they complained that others should not be given as much as they (Matthew 20:1-16). This is exactly what we see in the elder son. He says to his father, "How can you give all this to my younger brother. I am the one who has served you faithfully, not he". When the Israelites served God grudgingly, He sent them into captivity as He had told them He would: "Because you

did not serve the Lord your God with joy and gladness of heart...therefore you will serve your enemies" (Deuteronomy 28:47). God has no pleasure in legalistic service.

Self-centered Christians often serve God in order to keep up an impression of spirituality in the eyes of others. It is not pure and fervent love for Christ that keeps them active in Christian work, but the fear that others will consider them unspiritual if they do nothing. And when such people choose an easy path for themselves and one that will bring them financial gain, they try so hard to convince everybody that God has led them that way! Wherein is the need for such self-justification, unless there be the secret fear that others may now think less of their spirituality! What strain and bondage there is in serving God like that.

What joy and liberty there is in service that springs out of love for Christ! Love is the oil that lubricates the machinery of our lives so that it doesn't creak or groan! Jacob labored for seven years in order to obtain Rachel. And the Bible says that those seven years "seemed to him just as a few days, because of his love for her" (Genesis 29:20). So will it be with us, when our service for God springs out of love. There will be no strain and no drudgery. The Bible teaches that Christ's relationship with His church is like that of a husband to his wife. What does a husband expect primarily from his wife? Not her service. He does not marry her, for her to cook his food and wash his clothes, as of first importance. What he desires primarily is her love. Without that, all else is valueless. This is what God seeks from us too.

Unteachability

Another characteristic of the self-centered life is its unteachability. When the elder son was angry and stood outside the house, his father came out and entreated him. But he was stubborn and refused to listen.

Truly, "it is better to be a poor but wise youth than to be an old and foolish king who refuses all advice" (Ecclesiastes 4:13 -LB). The one who feels that he knows everything and is therefore unwilling to learn from others is indeed in a sorry state. The self-centered individual is so sure that he is right that he is unwilling to accept correction. And so he does not like being criticized. Our spirituality is perhaps never so tested as when we are opposed and contradicted.

A.W.Tozer has said that when we are criticized, the only thing that should concern us is whether the criticism is true or false, not whether the person doing the criticizing is a friend or an enemy. Our enemies often tell us more truths about ourselves than our friends do. An unyielding, headstrong disposition is a sure mark of the self-centered individual. And let us remember that a rigid, self-defensive attitude towards our fellowmen is indicative of a similar attitude in our hearts towards God. If we are unwilling to be taught and corrected by our brethren (even by the youngest among them), it only shows how wrapped-up in ourselves we are, in spite of all our spiritual experiences and our Bible-knowledge. The father pleads with the elder son, but the latter is hurt and filled with self-pity. The self-centered Christian loves to be coaxed and humored and petted like a little child - even by God. God has to keep on pleading with such persons, but they do not listen easily. Ultimately, they may find themselves, like the elder son, outside the Father's house altogether. Do you see how horrible the heart of man is! The self-centered person's attitude to his fellowmen Jealousy and the love of honor When our fellowship with God is strained or broken, it invariably affects our relationships with our fellowmen. When Adam was cut off from the life of

God, he immediately lost his love for Eve too. When God asked him whether he had sinned, he accused his wife and said, "Lord, the fault is not mine. It is this woman's."

Jealousy is one of the characteristics of the self-centered life in its attitude to others. The elder son (in the parable) was jealous of his younger brother and this was what made him angry. All these years the elder son had been the undisputed heir in the house. The servants had bowed to him. But now his position is threatened. Someone else is now the center of attraction in the house. And he can't bear to see this. Jealousy, that green-eyed monster, was quick to rear its ugly head in his heart. The self-centered life loves to be noticed by others. It loves the praise of men, and is evidently delighted when it is the sole object of admiration. It loves the highest place and draws attention to itself perpetually in one way or another. The self-centered Christian looks for opportunities to tell others of what he has done for the Lord - perhaps in a very pious way but secretly expecting their appreciation. And he is very unhappy and uneasy when someone else succeeds or has done something better than he has. The self-centered person is easily upset and touchy. He longs to be recognized by others and to be consulted for his opinions. In fact he would be quite offended if he were not consulted in a committee meeting, for example. He has such a high opinion of himself that he loves to talk and talk and talk, thinking that everyone else needs his valuable advice! There are Christians who, once they open their mouth, find it difficult to shut it again; and who keep on talking not realizing that everyone else around is nauseated. An uncontrolled tongue is one of the marks of an un-crucified self-life. The self-centered Christian does not know how to take the second place graciously and joyfully. He is upset when someone else is given the leadership and he himself has to play second fiddle. The only time that he is willing to take the second place is when he knows that thereby he can step into the first place on the retirement of the leader!

It was said of the German Kaiser that he always wished to be the center of attraction in every place. If he went to a christening, he'd wish he were the baby; if he went to a marriage; he'd wish he were the bride; and if he went to a funeral, he'd wish he were the corpse! Let us not forget that his heart was no worse than ours.

Self-centeredness in a man makes him draw the attention of others to himself, even in the most sacred of activities - whether it be preaching a sermon or even praying to God! A self-centered Christian leader will hinder the spiritual growth of those to whom he ministers - for he draws people to himself and not to Christ. A true man of God will always draw people beyond himself to Christ. This is what God calls each of us to do. But how few actually do this.

Hindering younger workers A self-centered Christian leader hinders others below him from becoming leaders, lest his own position be threatened. And so he ministers in such a way as to make himself a necessity to those to whom he ministers. This is utterly contrary to God's will. Oswald Chambers once said that anyone who made himself a necessity to some other soul had got out of God's order. God alone is the only absolute necessity to any human soul. May none of us ever try to take His place. No one is indispensable in Christ's church. God's work can easily carry on without us. In fact, it can carry on much better without the help of those conceited folk who consider themselves indispensable! We must recognize this fact constantly. I once read of a prescription to humble the soul of anyone who considered himself "indispensable"! It was suggested that he fill a bucket with water and put his hand in it up to his wrist - and then pull it out.

The hole that remains in the water will be a measure of how much he will be missed when he is gone!! Our gifts are useful to the church; but no-one is indispensable.

We must be willing to withdraw into the background anytime God calls us to. But the self-centered Christian worker will never accept that. He will want to hold on to his position for as long as possible. Many such "Christian leaders" are rotting away on their "thrones" today, hindering the work of God. They do not know what it is to fade graciously into the background and let someone else take their place.

You've probably heard the saying that success without a successor is a failure. Jesus recognized this and trained people to carry on His work. In 3½ years He had trained others to take over the leadership of His work. What an example for us to follow!

Paul recognized the necessity of training other people to carry on the work. In 2 Timothy 2:2, he told Timothy, "What I have committed to you. I want you to pass on to other people who will in turn be able to train others (the fourth generation)" (Paraphrase). What Paul was saying in effect was, "You must ensure that you commit this treasure to others. Don't ever hinder people younger than you, from coming up." Even businessmen recognize the principle that "success without a successor is a failure". But many Christian leaders haven't recognized it. Truly, "the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light."

It is indeed nothing but self-centeredness that makes a man jealous of someone younger who can do things better than he can. Cain was jealous of the fact that God had accepted Abel but rejected him. If Abel had been older than him, that might have been tolerable. But it was the awful fact that his younger brother was better than him that made him furious enough to slay Abel.

We see the same in the case of Joseph and his brothers. Joseph received divine revelations, and that made all his ten older brothers green with jealousy – so jealous that they wanted to kill him.

King Saul was jealous of young David, because the women sang, "Saul has slain thousands while David has slain ten thousands." From that day he determined to kill him. Man's history - and alas, the history of the Christian church too - is filled with the same story over and over again.

Likewise, the elderly Pharisees were jealous of the popularity of the young Jesus of Nazareth and determined to get him crucified, at any cost. On the other hand, what a refreshing contrast it is to look at a man like Barnabas in the New Testament. He was a senior worker who took the newly-converted Paul under his wing, when no one else would accept Paul. Barnabas brought him to the church in Antioch and encouraged him. In Acts 13:1-52, we read that Barnabas and Paul went out together on a missionary journey. And when Barnabas saw that God was calling this junior worker, Paul, to a larger ministry than his own, he willingly stepped back and graciously faded into the background. And the phrase, "Barnabas and Paul" changes almost unnoticed to "Paul and Barnabas" in the book of Acts. The Christian church suffers today, because there are few like Barnabas who know what it is to step back and let another be honored. We are willing to step back in matters of no importance. When passing through a door, for example, we don't mind stepping back and permitting another to go through first. But in the things that matter - such as position and leadership in the Christian church - we are not so ready to step back. Our self-life is so deceitful. We can have a false humility in things that don't count. But it is in important matters that we see ourselves as we really are.

Pride The self-centered person has an exalted opinion of himself. The elder son said, "All these years I've worked hard for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to." He was proud of his obedient service to his father. Pride arises in our hearts, not because of our virtues and our successes alone, but also because we feel that others around us have not done as well as we. Pride is always the result of a comparison of oneself with others. If others around us were obviously better than us, we would never feel proud. If there had been another brother in this story who had served the father more faithfully than the elder son the latter could not have felt proud at all in the presence of the other. But here, he felt, he could compare himself favorably with his younger brother. "I have served you faithfully," he tells his father, "but look at this younger son of yours. What has he done? He has wasted his money on harlots."

It was through pride that Lucifer fell. He compared himself with the other angels and felt that he was wiser, more beautiful and more exalted than them all. He was the anointed cherub, but he became the Devil. Since then, many others have lost God's anointing in the same manner. You may be like an angel, but pride can turn you into a devil in a moment. This was the disease that the Pharisees were plagued with. Jesus portrayed them accurately in the parable where the Pharisee prays, "Lord, I thank Thee that I am not like other men. I fast and pray and tithe etc., - ad nauseam. The self-life is like that. Sometimes, however, it can be more subtle - as in the case of the Sunday-School teacher who, after teaching this parable to her class, prayed, "Lord, we thank Thee that we are not like that Pharisee." We laugh at that because we imagine that we are not like that Sunday-school teacher!! Like the layers of an onion, spiritual pride is deeply and subtly entrenched within us - even at times cloaked in a false humility - which is the worst form of pride! The self-centered Christian worker is not necessarily one who goes about with an overbearing attitude. He has plenty of false humility on the exterior, a pious lowly appearance and "humble" talk. But inwardly, he compares himself with others and glories in his goodness and greatness and "humility"!

Condemnation of others

Such comparison of oneself with others finally leads to condemnation of others - sometimes with harsh sarcastic expressions. Listen to what the elder son tells his father: "This younger son of yours has wasted your money on harlots." Who had given him that information? No one. He had merely assumed the worst. When you hate someone, it is easy to believe the worst possible things concerning him. How the elder son delighted to expose his younger brother's faults instead of covering them. Do we see only the faults in other people? Have we secretly delighted in seeing another fall - particularly if he was one whom we did not like? Our hearts are so wicked that when other people fall, it does not grieve us entirely. On the contrary we are slightly pleased, for it shows us up as better men. Such an attitude is characteristic of a self-centered person. Do we judge the motives of others? The self-centered person sees someone doing something and says to himself, "I know why he's doing that," and proceeds to impute some carnal motive to the action. How much the self-life takes upon itself - even to sit upon the throne of God (for after all, it is God alone who can judge the motives of others). Paul warns us, "Be careful not to jump to conclusions before the Lord returns as to whether someone is a good servant or not. When the Lord comes, He will turn on the light so that everyone can see exactly what each one of us is really like, deep down in our hearts. Then everyone will know why (the motive with which) we have been doing the Lord's work" (1 Corinthians 4:5 -LB). Only when the Lord returns (and not till then) will we know the real motives

of each person.

Lovelessness The self-centered person does not have any real love for his fellowmen and this is the root cause of his hard attitude towards them. He may pretend to show much love, but lacks genuine Christ-like love. The elder son had never gone to his father even once in all those years, volunteering to go and search for his lost brother. He did not care whether his brother was dead or alive. All he was interested in was to make merry with his friends (Luke 15:29). So long as he himself was happy, it did not matter to him what happened to others. Are we wrapped up in ourselves like that? What is our attitude to backsliders? It is easier to love an unbeliever than a backslider. But if we truly have the compassion of Christ, we shall love both. The younger son in this story is a picture of a backslider. It's easy to condemn him. It is more difficult to love him and help him. The Bible says, "If a Christian is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help him back onto the right path" (Galatians 6:1 -LB). And again, "If you see a Christian sinning... you should ask God to forgive him and God will give him life" (1 John 5:16 -LB). Do we ever pray like that for those who have fallen? No. Why not? Because we are so centered in ourselves. When we seek for a deeper life and a closer walk with God, let us never forget that a deeper life should make us more outgoing. God does not grant us a closer walk with Him merely for us to "make merry with our friends." It is so easy for us to get into our little holy huddles (with those who believe as we do) and to think of our enjoyment alone - all the time looking down on those who have not had our "deeper life experience." That is not the deeper life at all. That is self-centeredness under the guise of spirituality; and it is an abomination to God.

Let us not be deceived. If we are only interested in "making merry" (even though it be spiritual merry-making) with other members of our "spiritual clique," and are unable to fellowship with believers who do not see eye-to-eye with us, then we are indeed in a state of spiritual stagnation. The Bible says, "He who does not love his brother is abiding in death" (1 John 3:14). The word translated "love" in this verse is the Greek word "agapao", which means "to value, to feel a concern for, to be faithful to, and to delight in". And so this verse really means that if we do not value our brothers and sisters (even those in other denominations than our own) if we do not feel a concern for them, if we are not faithful to them and if we do not delight in them, then, in spite of all our Bible-knowledge and our spiritual experiences, we are in a state of spiritual death. The primary ministry of the Holy Spirit

We may be young or old, holding any doctrine of 'holiness', with any number of experiences and blessings to our credit, but self dies hard, I'll tell you that. We must know what it is to take up the cross daily and follow Jesus if we are to live in victory over self. There is no other way. We shall come to that in greater detail in the ensuing chapters. But let us remember this meanwhile, that the Holy Spirit has come to help us put our self-centered life to death. The Bible says, "We naturally love to do evil things that are just the opposite to the things that the Holy Spirit tells us to do; and the good things we want to do when the Spirit has his way with us are just the opposite of our natural desires. These two forces (our self-life and the Holy Spirit) are constantly fighting each other to win control over us" (Galatians 5:17 -LB). In these days, particularly, when many Christians are confused about the ministry of the Holy Spirit, it is good for us to bear in mind that He has come as a Helper to help us put to death the deeds of the flesh (the self-life). He does many other things in and through us. Let us not despise any of them. But if we do not allow Him to put our self-life to death, then all our other experiences are valueless. The Bible says, "If you live

after the flesh, you will die, but if you through the Spirit put to death the deeds of the flesh (and we've just seen some of the deeds of the flesh in this chapter), you will live - for as many as are led by the Spirit (in this way) are the sons of God" (Romans 8:13-14). Romans 8:14 is often quoted out of context and made to refer to the Spirit's guidance in relation to where we are to go or what we are to do. But it is really connected with the previous verse and refers to the Holy Spirit leading us to put to death our self-centered desires. The verse also teaches that this is the identifying mark of the sons of God. In the parable in Luke 15:1-32, we notice that the father's love was the same for both his sons. He did not love the elder son any less than the younger. He came out of his house for both his sons. When his younger son came home, he went out of the house to welcome him, and when his elder son refused to come into the house, he went out to invite him in too. In fact he even tells him, "Son, you are ever with me and all that I have is yours." Do you see the largeness of God's heart even towards self-centered individuals? He loves us and wants to give us all that He has. But He has to deliver us from our self-centeredness first.

God does not love the harlot more than the self-righteous Pharisee. He loves both equally and He gave His Son to die for both. But the response in the hearts of the two may be different; and that is what makes the difference ultimately in the Father's house. The younger son who was once away from the father's house is now sitting at the table enjoying his father's riches. The elder son who had been inside all along is now outside. Truly, as the Lord said, many who are first now will be last in eternity, and many who are last here will be first there. It is only as we are willing to humble ourselves and acknowledge our corruption and respond wholeheartedly to the Father's love, that we shall be able to feast with Him at His table. May the Lord speak to our hearts.

04.02. CHAPTER 2 THE PATHWAY TO THE CHRIST-LIFE

CHAPTER 2 THE PATHWAY TO THE CHRIST-LIFE (1) BEING BROKEN

One of the verses which clearly describes the pathway that leads us out of our self-life into the full beauty of the Christ-life, is Galatians 2:20 : "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live. But it is no longer I that live but Christ Who lives in me." To us, this may be merely a good verse to be memorized or to get three points for a sermon from! But to the Apostle Paul who wrote it, it described his experience. He had exchanged the ashes of his self-life for the beauty of Christ's own Divine life. And this had become possible for him, because he had accepted death to himself.

It is only when the `I' (the self-life) is crucified that Christ can manifest Himself in His glory within us. In 2 Corinthians 3:18, we read that the Holy Spirit transforms us into the image of Christ from one degree of glory to another. This is the primary ministry of the Holy Spirit. Day by day, and year by year, the Spirit of God seeks to conform us increasingly to the likeness of Christ. But the pathway from each step of glory to the next is via the cross. If we through the Spirit, put to death our self-life, we shall know the abundance of Christ's life, not otherwise.

We today, can no longer go freely to the tree of life as Adam could, before He fell. In Genesis 3:24, we read that God placed a flaming sword in front of the tree of life. And so, before we can partake of this tree, the flaming sword has to fall upon and slay our self-life. There is no other way to reach the life of God. The way of the cross is the only way to fullness of life. This truth is taught in plain words as well as through symbols, throughout the Scriptures, from Genesis to Revelation. The cross breaks us as well as empties us. We shall consider these two aspects of the cross in this chapter and the next.

Jacob's two meetings with God Jacob was a man who learnt experimentally what it meant to be broken. We can learn many truths from his life.

One excellent thing about the Bible is that it is absolutely honest in recording the faults and failings of its greatest men. The Scriptures do not portray marble saints. We see in the Word of God, men and women exactly as they were - warts and all. This is why the biographies of Biblical characters are a greater encouragement to us than many biographies written in our day (which invariably hide the failings of the men they describe, and present them as super-saints).

Jacob was a man of like passions as we are. He was called of God, no doubt, and eternally predestined to be a chosen vessel for the working out of the Divine purposes. But he had a corrupt and deceitful heart, just like ours. God calls ordinary people to His service - not supermen. Very often, He calls the base and the despised and the weak of the world, to fulfill His purposes. He puts no premium whatever on human cleverness and ability in His service.

Jacob must have met with God many times in his life. But in the record given us in Genesis, there are two meetings with God that stand out. The first at Bethel, where he dreamt of a ladder reaching up to Heaven, and where he said, "This is the house of God" (Genesis 28:10-22). The

second at Peniel, where he wrestled with God and where he said, "I have seen God face to face" (Genesis 32:24-32). Between these two incidents lay twenty years. At Bethel, we read, he stopped to camp, when the sun had set (Genesis 28:11). That of course is only a statement indicating the time of day at which Jacob arrived at Bethel. But as we read the subsequent record of Jacob's life (in the next four chapters), we find that the sun had indeed set upon his life. And during the twenty years that followed this incident, the darkness grew deeper and deeper. But that was not the end of the story. At Peniel, he met with God again. And there, it is recorded, immediately after his meeting with God, that the sun rose, and he journeyed on (Genesis 32:31). Again a geographical fact - but true of Jacob's life as well. He was a different man from that day. The darkness passed away and the light of God shone upon his life.

God has given us the record of Jacob's darkness to show us that he was an ordinary man. He experienced the same darkness that we do. But he experienced a sunrise as well. And this encourages us to believe that no matter how great the darkness of our self-life, we can yet see the rising of the sun, if we will follow in Jacob's footsteps at Peniel.

Let us then look at Jacob's life - first when the sun had set on him; and secondly when the sun rose. The sun sets

Jacob came out of his mother's womb, grabbing his brother's leg. "So they called him Jacob (meaning Grabber)" (Genesis 25:26 -LB). And that is exactly what he was. He was always grabbing something from someone for himself. He grabbed the birthright from his brother and later the blessing from his father. He grabbed Rachel from her father Laban, and later grabbed Laban's property as well.

Jacob was a bargainer too. He bargained with Esau for the birthright. And later, he bargained with Laban for Rachel. At Bethel, we find him even bargaining with God.

Jacob was also a deceiver. When he wanted his father's blessing, he was prepared to deceive his father in order to get it. He was even prepared to take the Name of God in telling the lie. When Isaac asks him how he got the meat so quickly, he replies, "The Lord brought it to me" (Genesis 27:20). How lightly he could even take the Lord's Name and tell a lie! He certainly had no fear of God.

Such was Jacob's nature - grabbing, bargaining and deceiving - looking after his own earthly interests all the time. He was very much a child of Adam.

Coming short of God's calling

Finally, at Bethel, the sun set upon his life. There, in a dream, God gave Jacob a revelation of His great and glorious purpose for his life. He gave Jacob the same promises that he had given Abraham. But how does Jacob respond? He says, in effect, "Lord, I'm not so interested in all those spiritual blessings. If you'll only protect me from harm and danger and give me food to eat and clothes to wear, I'll be quite happy. I'll give you one-tenth of my income and acknowledge you as my God" (Genesis 28:20-22).

Many Christians are just like that. God calls them to something great and glorious and they settle for something far, far inferior. God calls them to expend their energies in His work, but they waste their lives making money and seeking honor in this world. How few there are among God's people

who recognize their high calling! One such was a man of God who told his son, "I should not like it, if you were meant by God to be a missionary, that you drivel down to becoming a king or a millionaire. What are your kings and nobles compared with the dignity of winning souls to Christ."

God's purpose for us - as for Jacob - extends far beyond mere physical blessings. His purpose is basically twofold - first that we might manifest the life of Christ to others; and secondly, that we might minister that life to others. This is the calling of the Christian - and there can be no greater calling on earth. Yet many Christians like Jacob, don't recognize this - even some who are in Christian work. God gives them some spiritual gift or ability and soon they are taken up with that, and go off on a tangent, away from the central purpose of God for their lives. Like a child who is taken up with a toy, they are taken up with their gift. It fills their whole vision and they never see anything beyond. How cleverly Satan has sidetracked them without their even realizing it!

Jacob could not take in the vastness of God's purpose for his life. He was satisfied with toys, when God wanted him to have heavenly riches. The result of such a narrow vision was that God's purposes for Jacob's life were delayed. God had to wait twenty years, before Jacob was willing to take his mind away from the things of the world and set it on things above. How many Christians are hindering and delaying God's glorious purposes for their lives, because of the narrowness of their vision, because they are taken up with things lesser than God's highest.

Paul was a different man. He could say at the end of his life that he had not been disobedient to the heavenly vision. On the Damascus Road, God had given him a vision of the great ministry He had for him - to open the blind eyes of people and to deliver them from Satan's power through the message of the gospel (Acts 26:16-19). And Paul never got bogged down with social work or anything lesser than what God had called him to. But Jacob did not respond like that, when God spoke to him. And so the sun set on his life, and things grew darker and darker. But the wonderful thing is that God did not let Jacob go. God had promised him at Bethel, "I will not leave you until I have fulfilled My promises to you;" and God kept His word. This is what encourages us - the perseverance of God with His stubborn children.

Divine Discipline In order to fulfill His promises to Jacob, God had to discipline him severely. And so we see from this point in the story up to the second meeting at Peniel, twenty years of Divine chastening in Jacob's life in order that Jacob might come to the point where he would accept God's highest for his life.

First of all, God placed Jacob alongside another shrewd person. Laban was just as smart as Jacob, and as they lived together and came into close contact with each other, plenty of friction was generated and some of Jacob's rough edges were rubbed off. God knows whom to place us with in order to purge us of our crookedness. God measures out His disciplines to us, according to our individual need; and He makes all things work together for our good, even when He places us alongside someone like Laban - provided we don't rebel against God's providences. Many people have learnt sanctification through God leading them to marry someone just like themselves. "The sparks fly when iron strikes iron" (Proverbs 27:17 -LB) - but it sharpens both pieces of iron!

Jacob, as last, begins to reap what he had sown. All his life he had been cheating others. Now he gets cheated himself. He goes through his wedding ceremony, thinking he is marrying Rachel, but discovers the next morning that he has actually married Leah! He had met his match in Laban! He

now gets a taste himself of the bitter medicine that he had been doling out to others. God does not discipline without a purpose or arbitrarily. He knows what dosage each person needs and gives the medicine accordingly. With the merciful, God shows Himself merciful; and with the stubborn, He shows Himself stubborn (Psalms 18:25). He knows how to deal with every Jacob.

Jacob's problems were not yet over. After fourteen years of hard work, he obtained Rachel, only to discover that she was barren. God was merciful and finally gave Jacob a child through her, but even this brings no change in Jacob. He still cannot trust God, but continues to scheme.

He next plans to rob Laban of his property. Jacob was clever. He knew all the tricks of the trade, and he knew how to get the best of Laban's cattle. How long God had to wait before Jacob learned to trust in Him and forsake his own human ingenuity. It is the same problem that God has with many of His children today. He is not impressed by our cleverness. He waits for us to see the folly of all that, before He can use us to fulfill His will.

We find Jacob finally scheming to run away from Laban. He is tired of living with his father-in-law and wants to go away. But when he does run away, he finds that he has only jumped out of the frying pan into the fire. He hears that Esau is approaching him with a large army and that Laban is pursuing him from the rear. The one who tries to escape God's disciplines finds that it is not an easy task. If Jacob had left the matter in God's hands, God would have released him from Laban in His own way. But Jacob had not learned to trust God yet.

Finding himself hedged in and his life in danger, Jacob now begins to pray. He is quick to remind God of His promises made at Bethel (Genesis 32:9-12). But prayer alone is not sufficient for Jacob. He has to scheme too. He thinks up a clever plan of saving part of his company at least - just in case God lets him down. How very much like those who talk of trusting God and "living by faith", but all the time have some earthly source of security to fall back upon just in case faith in God alone does not work! Jacob was indeed very much like us. And how often we have seen, as Jacob realized when he met Esau, that our fears were unfounded, that there was no need to have schemed and worried and doubted God. Esau's heart was in God's hands, and God could turn it (as Proverbs 21:1 says) in whichever direction He chose. "When a man is trying to please God, God makes even his worst enemies to be at peace with him" (Proverbs 16:7 -LB). God had told Jacob clearly that He would take care of him. But Jacob could not believe God's promise.

Jacob had twenty long and painful years of chastening under God's hand. We are not given all the details of what Jacob underwent - but he must have had a very rough time. It must have been physically exhausting too - working and sleeping out in the open, exposed to the sun and the dew and the rain. But all this discipline was necessary, in order to shatter Jacob's self-sufficiency and self-confidence. Only in later years, when he looked back, would he be able to appreciate what God took him through - not now. "God's correction is always right and for our best good, that we may share His holiness. (But) being punished isn't enjoyable while it is happening - it hurts! But afterwards, we can see the result, a quiet growth in grace and character" (Hebrews 12:10-11 -LB). As the well-known hymn says:

"With mercy and with judgment, my web of time He wove, And aye, the dews of sorrow were lusted by His love:

I'll bless the Hand that guided, I'll bless the Heart that planned When throned where glory dwelleth in Immanuel's land." The sun rises

We have seen how the sun set upon Jacob's life and how the darkness deepened through the ensuing twenty years. He was indeed an ordinary man just like us. And on such a man the sun rose one day. God met with him a second time and changed him into an "Israel" - a prince of God.

Only God could have seen any good in such a useless person as Jacob, and followed after him patiently, without giving up hope. There we see the grace and greatness of our God. And this is what encourages us. In spite of all our self-centeredness, God does not throw us on the scrap-heap. He is patient with us.

We may not believe in the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, but we cannot but believe in the perseverance of God. "I will not leave you until I have done that which I have promised," was His promise to Jacob at Bethel - and His promise to us. How wonderful and how humiliating it is to know the longsuffering of God in His dealings with us. If He were not like that, none of us would have any hope. At Peniel, God dealt a final blow to Jacob. He had been disciplining Jacob and breaking him, bit by bit, over the previous twenty years. But now the time had come to finish the work with one final blow. If God had not done that here, it might have taken twenty more years for the sun to rise on Jacob. God knows the right time to shatter our self-confidence once-and-for-all.

Blessed by God And when God finally broke Jacob, then he was truly blessed. The record reads, "God blessed Jacob there" (Genesis 32:29). The word "bless" is perhaps the most frequently used word in the prayers of Christians. But few understand its real meaning.

What is blessing? What was the blessing Jacob got? It is described in Genesis 32:28 as "power with God and power with men". This is the blessing that we all need and that we should be seeking for. And this alone can make the sun to rise upon our lives. Nothing less than this is what God desires to give His people. Jesus referred to this blessing when He asked His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father. He said, "When the Holy Spirit is come upon you, you shall receive power" (Acts 1:8) - power with God and power with men. Jacobs would be transformed by the Spirit's power into Israels. This was what made the sun to rise upon Peter's life and upon the lives of the other disciples that day in the upper room at Jerusalem. And this alone can provide the answer to the crookedness of our self-life. It is not a question of reformation or of good resolutions or even of our determination. It is a question of the Holy Spirit possessing us fully and governing and ruling our lives. But where does the Spirit lead us? Always to the cross. It is only when we are crucified, that Christ can live in us in His fullness, It was when Jesus was baptized, buried under the waters - symbolically accepting death to Himself - that the Holy Spirit came upon Him (Matthew 3:16). It was when Jacob was broken that he was blessed. It was only after Moses' self-confidence had been shattered through 40 years of looking after sheep, that he was ready to deliver Israel. The rock had to be smitten before the living waters could flow. The Israelites had to go through the River Jordan (symbolizing death and burial) before they could enter Canaan (symbolizing life in the fullness of the Spirit). Gideon's army had to break their pitchers before the light inside was visible. The alabaster vial had to be broken before the odor of the ointment could fill the house. Peter's boastful self-confidence had to be shattered before he was ready for Pentecost. We find this truth throughout Scripture.

It would be dangerous for God to empower an unbroken man. It would be like giving a sharp knife to a 6-month old baby, or like handling 20,000 volts of electricity without proper insulation. God is careful. He does not give the power of His Spirit to those in whom self is still unbroken. And He removes His power from a man when he ceases to be broken.

Jacob was now blessed by God Himself. Earlier, Isaac had laid his hands on Jacob and blessed him, when Jacob brought him the venison (Genesis 27:23). But that had brought no change in Jacob's life. The real blessing came at Peniel. And this is the lesson we need to learn too. No man can ever give us this blessing. A man - even a saintly man like Isaac - may lay his empty hands on our empty heads and pray for us. Yet we may get nothing. Only God can really empower us. When Isaac put his hands on Jacob's head, the sun merely set on Jacob's life. But when God blessed him, the sun rose! Power belongs to God and He is the only one who can ever give it to us. The record says, "God blessed Jacob there" (Genesis 32:29) - there, where Jacob fulfilled certain conditions and came to a certain point in his life. There were reasons why God blessed Jacob there - at Peniel.

Alone with God

First of all, Jacob was blessed in the place where he was alone with God. He sent everyone else away and was alone (Genesis 32:24). 20th century believers find it difficult to spend much time alone with God. The spirit of the jet-age has got into most of us, and we are in a perpetual state of busyness. The trouble is not with our temperament or our culture. We just don't have our priorities right - that's all.

Jesus once said that the one thing needful for a believer was to sit at His feet and listen to Him (Luke 10:42). But we don't believe that any longer and so suffer the disastrous consequences of disregarding Jesus' words. If we are always busy with our various activities and do not know what it is to get alone with God in fasting and prayer, we shall certainly not know God's power or blessing - His real power, I mean, not the cheap counterfeits of which many are boasting.

Broken by God

Secondly, Jacob was blessed in the place where he was broken completely. At Peniel, a Man wrestled with Jacob. God had been wrestling with Jacob for twenty years, but Jacob had refused to yield. God had tried to show him how everything he had put his hand to had gone wrong, despite his cleverness and his planning. But Jacob was still stubborn. Finally God struck Jacob's hip-socket so that his thigh was dislocated (Genesis 32:25). The thigh is the strongest part of the body, and that was the part that God struck. The strong points in our life are what God seeks to shatter. Simon Peter had once thought that his strong point spiritually, was his courage. Even if everyone else denied the Lord, he would never do so. And so God had to break him there. Peter denied the Lord before any of the others did, and not just once but thrice, and that too when questioned by a weak little servant-girl! That was enough to shatter Peter. In the physical realm, Peter's strong point was fishing. If there was one thing he was an expert at, it was fishing. And so God broke him at that point as well. Peter fishes all night and catches nothing. And that happened not just once but twice (Luke 5:5; John 21:3). God broke him at his strongest points to teach him his total inability to serve God.

It took 3½ years for the disciples to learn, that without Christ they could do nothing. It takes even longer for some of us. But it is only in the measure in which we learn the truth of those words that we can know God's power. When Peter was shattered at his strongest points - when he had been struck by God in his "thigh" - then he was ready for Pentecost.

Moses' strong point was his leadership potential, his eloquence and his training in the best academies of Egypt. He thought he was well qualified to be the leader of the Israelites (Acts 7:25). But God did not stand by him until, forty years later, shattered in his strongest points, he said, "Lord, I'm not the person for a job like that ...I'm not a good speaker ...please send someone else" (Exodus 3:11; Exodus 4:10; Exodus 4:13 -LB). Then God took him up and used him mightily. God has to wait till our self-sufficiency and our self-confidence are shattered, and we are broken and no longer think highly of ourselves or our capabilities. Then He can commit Himself to us unreservedly.

Hungry for God

Thirdly, Jacob was blessed in the place where he was earnest and hungry for God. "I will not leave you", he cries out, "until you bless me" (Genesis 32:26). How God had waited for twenty long years to hear those words from Jacob. He, who had spent his life grabbing the birthright, women, money and property, now lets go of them all and grabs hold of God. This was the point towards which God had been working in Jacob's life all along. It must have delighted God's heart when Jacob at last lost sight of the temporal things of earth and longed and thirsted for God Himself and for His blessing. We are told in Hosea 12:4, that Jacob wept and pleaded for a blessing that night at Peniel. What a different man he was that night compared with his earlier years when he desired only the things of this world. God's dealings with him at last bore fruit!

Before God blessed Jacob fully, He tested Jacob's earnestness. He said to Jacob, "Let me go," testing whether Jacob would be satisfied with what he had got or whether he would yearn for more. It was just as Elijah tested Elisha in later years. Elijah said, "Let me go," again and again, but Elisha refused to be shaken off - and so got a double portion of Elijah's spirit (2 Kings 2:1-25). Jesus, likewise, tested the two disciples walking to Emmaus (Luke 24:15-31). When they reached their house, Jesus acted as though He would go further. But the two disciples would not let Him go - and they got a blessing as a result.

God tests us too. He can never bless a man fully until the man is in dead earnest for God's best. We need to thirst like Jacob, saying, "Lord, there is more to the Christian life than I've experienced thus far. I'm not satisfied. I want all Thy fullness at any cost." When we come to that point, it is but a short step to the fullness of God's blessing.

Notice in the incident at Peniel, that it was when Jacob was in a state of weakness (after his thigh had been dislocated), that he said, "I will not let you go, God." God could easily have left him and gone, but He didn't. For it is when a man is most weak in himself that he has greatest power with God. As the Apostle Paul said, "I am glad to boast about how weak I am; I am glad to be a living demonstration of Christ's power, instead of showing off my own power and abilities...for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9-10 -LB). God's power is most effectively demonstrated in human weakness. And so with Jacob, it is when he is defeated, broken and utterly weak, that God tells him, "You have now prevailed." One would think that God should have said, "You have at

last been defeated." But no. The word is, "You have prevailed. You shall henceforth have power with God and with men" (Genesis 32:28). We prevail, when God has shattered us of our own strength and self-sufficiency - as the words of the hymn say, "Make me a captive, Lord, and then I shall be free." This is the glorious paradox of the Christian life.

If ever there was a picture of weakness, surely it is seen in a man hanging helplessly on a cross. Beaten and buffeted and finally nailed to the cross, Christ died as a weak and exhausted man. But there the power of God was displayed in the overthrow of the Devil and the deliverance of men (Hebrews 2:14; Colossians 2:14-15). "Christ crucified is the power of God," Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "He was crucified in weakness, but He lives by the power of God. We also are weak with Him, but shall live with Him by the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:23-24; 2 Corinthians 13:4). The Corinthian Christians were mistaking the gift of tongues for evidence of being endued with God's power, and so Paul had to correct their error. In essence he tells them, "Brethren, the power of God is not seen in the gift of tongues. Thank God if you have that gift. But don't make any mistake. The power of God is manifested only in and via the cross. It is in human weakness that the might of God is seen."

I remember hearing a man of God saying how God showed him the secret of spiritual power. He had been seeking God for some spectacular manifestation for some time. Finally the Lord asked him, "How did you receive the forgiveness of your sins?" He replied, "Lord, I recognized that I was the greatest sinner on earth and You forgave me freely." Then the Lord said to him, "Now recognize that you are the weakest man on earth and you will have My power." Thus he began to experience God's power in his life. The way of the cross is the way of power. In the measure in which we walk that pathway we shall have God's power in our life, and people will be blessed through our life and our ministry. When the five loaves are broken, then and not until then, will the multitude be fed.

Honest with God

Finally, Jacob was blessed in the place where he was honest with God. God asks him, "What is your name?" Twenty years earlier, when his father had asked him the same question, he had lied and said, "I am Esau" (Genesis 27:19). But now he is honest. He says, "Lord, I am Jacob" - or in other words, "Lord, I am a grabber, a deceiver and a bargainer." There was no guile in Jacob now. And so God could bless him.

Years later, when Jesus looked at Nathaniel, you remember what He said: "Behold an Israelite - a true Israel, a genuine prince of God - in whom there is no 'Jacob', no guile" (John 1:47). This is what God waits to see in us too. Only then can He empower us.

God blessed Jacob there - when he was honest, when he did not want to pretend any more, when he confessed, "Lord I'm a hypocrite. There is shame and pretense in my life." I tell you, it takes real brokenness for a man to acknowledge that from the depths of his heart. Many Christian leaders say words like that with false humility - to gain a reputation for being humble. I am not referring to that type of abomination. What I mean is an honesty that comes out of a truly broken and contrite heart. That is costly. There is so much guile in all of us. May God have mercy on us for pretending to be so sanctified when we are not. Let us covet sincerity and honesty and openness with all of our hearts, and then there will be no limit to God's blessing upon our lives.

The ascending sun

Jacob was broken and thereby he became Israel. The sun rose on his life at last. This did not however, mean that Jacob had become perfect. There is no once-for-all experience that guarantees perfection. God had to discipline him further, for he still had plenty to learn. In Genesis 33:1-20 and Genesis 34:1-31, we read of some of Jacob's disobediences and blunders. But the sun had risen on his life and he had entered into a new spiritual plane. The light had to increase in its brightness, no doubt, but that would come as the sun continued to ascend in the sky to its noon-day position. The Bible says, "The path of the just (the justified man) is like the shining light (of the sun) that shines more and more (from sunrise onwards) unto the perfect (noon) day" (Proverbs 4:18). So it was with Jacob and so it must be with us. If we submit to God's dealings with us, as Jacob finally did, the light of God will continuously increase upon our lives. And as it does so, the shadow of our self-life will continue to decrease until finally when the sun is overhead (when Christ returns), the shadows will disappear altogether and Christ will be all in all.

What was Jacob's testimony in later years, about his Peniel experience? He did not keep telling everyone that on such-and-such a date he had received a second blessing. No. His testimony was something quite different. In Hebrews 11:1-40, we are given an inkling as to what Jacob's testimony was. There, we are given a record of some of the exploits of great men of faith in the Old Testament - shutting lions' mouths, raising the dead etc., Jacob's name appears in the list too - and what do you think is recorded of him? "He worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff" (Hebrews 11:21). It looks quite incongruous to include something like that in a chapter full of spectacular events!

What Jacob did, certainly does not look like a "miracle of faith." But it was. It was perhaps a greater miracle than the others miracles recorded in the chapter. The staff had become necessary to Jacob, because his thigh had been dislocated at Peniel. Leaning upon that staff, he would always remember the miracle that God had wrought in his life, in breaking his stubborn self-will. His leaning upon his staff now symbolized his helpless, moment-by-moment dependence on his God. He worshipped God now as a broken man. He gloried in his weakness and his infirmity - and that was his daily testimony. So it was with the Apostle Paul too. And so it has been with the great men and women of God in all ages. They rejoiced in their limitations and not in their achievements. What a lesson for proud, self-confident 20th-century Christians!

Towards the end of his life, we see Jacob as a prophet. He prophesies concerning the future of his descendants (Genesis 49:1-33). Only a man who has been under God's hand and who has submitted to the Divine disciplines is qualified to prophesy. Jacob had learnt through experience. He was no seminary-qualified theoretician. He had been through the grill and qualified in God's University. He knew the secret counsels of God. Truly he was a prince of God. What a wonderful thing it is to be purged by God. What fruitfulness it results in!

Notice finally, a word of encouragement that runs through the Bible. God calls Himself, "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (not "Israel," but "Jacob")." This is wonderful indeed! He is the God of Jacob. He has linked His Name with the name of Jacob, the grabber and the deceiver. This is our encouragement. Our God is the God of the man with the warped personality. He is the God of the woman with the difficult temperament. What meaning there is in the psalmist's words, "The God of Jacob is our refuge" (Psalms 46:7; Psalms 46:11). He is not only the Lord of Hosts, but

also the God of Jacob. Praise be to His Name!

What God has begun in us He will complete. As perfect as was the work of the Father in creation and as perfect as was the work of the Son in our redemption, so perfect will the work of the Holy Spirit be in our sanctification. God is faithful.

"He Who began the good work within [us] will keep right on helping [us] grow in grace until His task within [us] is finally finished on that day when Jesus Christ returns" (Php 1:6 -LB). He will complete His work in us, as He completed His work in Jacob. But we must respond as Jacob did at Peniel. If however we do not cooperate with Him, but frustrate His workings in us, we shall ultimately stand before Him with the tragedy of a wasted, fruitless life. God wants us to be fruitful, but He won't compel us. He wants to transform us into the likeness of Christ, but He will never override our free-will. The pathway to the Christ-life is via the cross - being broken thereon. What power is released when an atom is broken! What power can be released when a child of God is broken in God's Hand! May the Lord teach us this lesson and write it deeply upon our hearts.

04.03. CHAPTER 3 THE PATHWAY TO THE CHRIST-LIFE

CHAPTER 3 THE PATHWAY TO THE CHRIST-LIFE (2) BEING EMPTIED The way of the cross involves not only being broken but also being emptied.

"It is no longer I", said Paul. He had allowed himself to be emptied of the "I", so that Christ might live and rule in him. Even Jesus emptied Himself when He came down from the Throne of God to the awful depths of the cross (Php 2:5-8). The cross will mean the same in our lives as it did to Jesus and to Paul.

We shall look at the life of Abraham in this chapter, to see what it means to be emptied. In James 2:23, Abraham is called "the friend of God". He was a type of those who, in the New Testament age, would be called the friends of God. Jesus told His disciples, just before He went to the cross, "You are My friends if you obey Me (as Abraham did). I no longer call you slaves, for a master does not confide in His slaves; now you are My friends, proved by the fact that I have told you everything the Father told Me" (John 15:14-15 -LB).

God calls us in this New Testament age to be, not just His servants but His friends - entering into His secret counsels and understanding the hidden mysteries of His Word. Abraham was such a friend. God revealed His secrets to him (Genesis 18:17-19).

God blessed Abraham mightily. And we are told that "all who trust in Christ [can] share the same blessing Abraham received" (Galatians 3:9 -LB). What was the blessing with which God blessed Abraham. God's promise to Abraham was, "I will bless you" (Genesis 12:2). We saw in the last chapter what it means to be blessed of God. But God's promise to Abraham did not end with "I will bless you." He went on to say, "...and you will be a blessing to others." This was God's full purpose for Abraham and is His purpose for us today. We are not only to be blessed but also to be channels through which that blessing is communicated to others.

Galatians 3:14 makes it clear that the blessing of Abraham for us today is connected with the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the One Who communicates the abundant life of Christ to us and then ministers that same life through us to others. In James 2:21-23, where Abraham is called God's friend, two incidents from Abraham's life are mentioned:

(a) His believing God when God told him that he would have a son (James 2:23 referring to Genesis 15:6).

(b) His offering up Isaac when God asked him to (James 2:21 -referring to Genesis 22:1-24).

These two incidents described in Genesis 15:1-21; Genesis 22:1-24 are brought together by James when referring to Abraham being called God's friend. These two chapters in Genesis describe two important periods in Abraham's life. Moreover, in these two important chapters, we find the first occurrences in the Bible of two important words - "believe" (Genesis 15:6) and "worship" (Genesis 22:5).

Since all Scripture is inspired by God, there must be some significance attached to the first time an important word occurs in Scripture. These two passages of Scripture therefore will have much to teach us concerning the true meanings of faith and worship. And these were the two lessons that Abraham had to learn - what it meant to believe God and what it meant to worship Him. Both of these are possible only as we accept the cross as the instrument of our self-emptying.

Trusting God

Abraham had to learn that trusting God meant not merely intellectual belief, but also being emptied of self-sufficiency and self-dependence. In Genesis 15:1-21 (where the word "believe" occurs in Genesis 15:6), the paragraph begins with the words, "After these things..." (Genesis 15:1). The previous chapter, to which that phrase refers back, indicates that it was a time of great triumph in Abraham's life. With 318 untrained servants, he had gone out and defeated the armies of four kings. And then at the end of all that, he had conducted himself so nobly before the king of Sodom, refusing to take any reward for his efforts. God had helped him marvelously on both these occasions. Now, in the hour of his triumph, it was so easy for Abraham to feel self-sufficient. At such a time, God spoke to Abraham and told him that he was going to have a son. And not only that, but God also said that through that son would come a seed that would be like the stars of the heaven for number. It looked almost impossible, but Abraham believed the Lord (Genesis 15:6). The Hebrew word translated "believe" here is "aman" which is the word we use at the end of our prayers: "Amen". It means, "It shall be so". When God told Abraham that he was going to have a son, he replied with an "Amen", meaning in essence, "Lord, I don't know how this is going to take place. But since You have said it, I believe it shall be so."

God's promise looked difficult of fulfillment because Sarah was barren. Of course, Abraham himself was still fertile. So there was some hope. In other words, the promise was not exactly impossible, but certainly difficult.

Helping God out of a tight spot

After Abraham heard God's promise, he must have reasoned with himself and said, "Well, I suppose, I should help God out in this situation, since Sarah is barren". And so, he readily accepted Sarah's suggestion to unite with Hagar his maid. He sincerely desired to help God. He felt that God was in a tight spot, having made a promise that could not, humanly speaking, be fulfilled. God's reputation was at stake. And so, to save God out of this awkward situation, Abraham united with Hagar and produced Ishmael! But God rejected Ishmael as unacceptable, for he was the product of man's self-effort. So much of the motivation for Christian work in our day, alas, arises out of the same carnal reasoning that Abraham had. Believers are told that God is depending on their efforts and that if they let Him down, His purposes will not be fulfilled! Things apparently have not worked out exactly as God planned and as a result He is in a tight spot now! Some exhortations to Christian service give us the impression that the Almighty is now at His wit's end and is desperately in need of our help! No doubt, God uses human agency for the outworking of His purposes. He has voluntarily accepted this limitation because He wants us to have the privilege of cooperating with Him in His work. But that certainly does not mean that if we disobey God, His work will remain undone. No. He is sovereign. There is certainly a work for Jesus that we can do; but if we don't do it, He will just pass us by and get someone else to do the job - and we shall miss the privilege of being God's co-workers. Puny men are not going to hinder God from

carrying out His program.

God can carry on His work very well without our help. We need to recognize this fact. If our service for God originates out of any idea that we are helping God out of a tight spot, we shall only produce unacceptable Ishmaels. That service which has its roots in human energy, fleshly wisdom, human ability and natural talents (even at their very best) is totally unacceptable to God. Ishmael may be very smart and impressive. Abraham may even cry out to God saying, "Oh that Ishmael might live before Thee" (Genesis 17:18). But God's answer is "No. He was born through your strength, Abraham. So I cannot accept him, however good he may be". And so with service that originates from ourselves. God did not accept it then and He will not accept it today! If there is any human explanation for our Christian service - if it is merely the result of excellent theological training that our sharp minds have assimilated, or made possible because we have access to enough money to support ourselves in Christian work - then however impressive our work may appear in the eyes of men, it will be burnt up in the day of testing as wood, hay and straw. That day will reveal the multitude of "Ishmaels" produced by well-meaning Christians, who were never emptied of their self-sufficiency. The only work that will abide for eternity is that which is produced in humble dependence upon the power of God's Holy Spirit. May God help us to learn that lesson now, instead of having regrets at Christ's judgment-seat.

Works of faith Our self-life is so subtle and so deceitful that it can enter the very sanctuary of God and try to serve Him there. We have to watch that - and put self to death even when it seeks to serve God.

God's work has to be a work of faith - that is, one that originates in man's helpless dependence upon God. So it is not a question of how effective our work is in the eyes of men or in our own eyes. The important question is whether our work is the result of the Holy Spirit's working, or our own. God is not so much interested in how much is done, as in the question of whose power has energized the work. Was the work done by the power of money and intellectual ability, or by the power of the Holy Spirit? This is the real test of a spiritual work, a work of faith. In other words, God is more interested in quality than in quantity. God's true work carries on today, as of old, not by human power or might, but by the power of the Holy Spirit (Zechariah 4:6). We forget this truth to our own peril.

Man's extremity - God's opportunity

Isaac, unlike Ishmael, was not the product of Abraham's strength. Abraham had become sterile by then. (This is clear from Romans 4:19 where not only Sarah's womb but Abraham's body is also said to be "dead"). Isaac was born through God strengthening impotent Abraham. This is the type of service that lasts for eternity. One "Isaac" is worth a thousand "Ishmaels." Abraham could keep Ishmael for some time, but finally God asked him to cast him out (Genesis 21:10-14). All "Ishmaels" will have to be cast out one day. Only Isaac could remain with Abraham. There is a spiritual lesson here. Only that service which is the result of God working through us will remain for eternity. Everything else will be burnt up. You may have heard the saying, "Only one life, it will soon be past; only what's done for Christ will last." It would be more accurate to say, "Only what Christ does through me will last."

Only that which is “from Him and through Him and to Him” (Romans 11:36) will last for eternity. (See my book *Living As Jesus Lived* for a fuller exposition of this.)

Paul lived and labored according to God’s living and working through him (Galatians 2:20 : and Colossians 1:29). Hence his life and labors were so effective. He lived by faith and he worked by faith. In Genesis 16:16, we read that Abraham was 86 years old when Hagar bore Ishmael. In the very next verse (Genesis 17:1), we read that Abraham was 99 years old when God appeared to him again. We see here a gap of 13 years. Those were years when God waited for Abraham to become impotent. God could not fulfill His promise, till Abraham had become impotent. That is God’s way with all His servants. He cannot work through them till they recognize their impotence. And in some cases, He has to wait for many years.

Abraham needed to learn what it really meant to trust God. He had to learn that it was only when he became impotent that he could truly exercise faith. In Romans 4:19-21, we read that although Abraham knew that his body was impotent to produce a son, yet that did not worry him. He was strong in faith and glorified God by believing that God was well able to perform what He had promised. He did not waver in unbelief, for his feet stood firm on the rock of God’s Word to him. But when could Abraham exercise such faith? Only when he had come to an end of all confidence in his own ability. We too can exercise real faith only when we reach that state of utter helplessness. This is God’s way, so that no flesh may ever glory in His presence. This does not however mean that we do nothing. No. God does not want us to be reduced to a state of inactivity. That is the other extreme of error. God used Abraham to produce Isaac. God didn’t do it all by Himself, for Isaac was not born apart from Abraham doing his part. No. But there was a difference between the birth of Ishmael and the birth of Isaac. In both cases, Abraham was the father. But in the first case, it was in dependence upon his own strength; in the second, in dependence upon the power of God. That was the difference - and what a vital difference! No confidence in the flesh At the end of the thirteen years of waiting, when God appeared to Abraham, He gave him the covenant of circumcision (Genesis 17:11). Circumcision involved a cutting-off and a casting-off of human flesh. It symbolized a casting off of all confidence in self – as Paul explains in Php 3:3 : “We are the circumcision....who have no confidence in the flesh.”

Notice, that in the very same year that Abraham obeyed God and circumcised himself, Isaac was conceived (cf. Genesis 17:1; Genesis 21:5). There is a lesson for us to learn here. God waits until we learn to put no confidence in ourselves and our abilities. And when we finally come to the place where we realize that it is impossible for us in ourselves to serve God and to please Him (Romans 8:8), and when we trust God to work through us, then He takes us up and does an eternal work through us. At the age of 85, the birth of a child to Abraham looked difficult. By the time he was 99 and impotent, that which had been difficult had now become impossible. Then God acted.

Someone has said that in a true work of God, there are three stages - Difficult, Impossible and Done! Human wisdom finds it difficult to follow such reasoning, for spiritual truth is foolishness to the natural mind. But this is God’s way. No flesh will ever be able to glory in God’s presence, either now or in eternity (See 1 Corinthians 1:29). God is working to the point where finally Christ will have the pre-eminence in all things (Colossians 1:18). If there is going to be some work in Heaven, which lasts for eternity, which has been done by human ingenuity and cleverness, then all through eternity some man will be able to take the credit for it. But God is going to make sure that it will not

be so. All that ministers to human glory will be burnt up at the judgment seat of Christ. Here on earth, men may receive the credit for something they do, but that will all be reduced to ashes before we reach the shores of eternity. One of these days, God will gather up all things in Christ and then throughout eternal ages Christ alone will have the pre-eminence.

Jessie Penn-Lewis was a woman whose writings have helped many people understand the way of the cross. About ten years after her conversion, when seeking to be filled with the Holy Spirit, she tells of how she got a terrible revelation. She saw a hand holding up a bundle of filthy rags and a gentle voice saying, "This is the outcome of all your past service for God". She protested that she had been consecrated to the Lord for years. But the Lord told her that all her service had been merely consecrated SELF – the outcome of her own energy and her own plans. And then she heard one word spoken to her, "Crucified". She had not asked to be crucified, she thought, but to be filled. But she rested on that one word and came to know Jesus as the Risen Lord!!

Self must be crucified, before there can be any service that pleases God. We may serve God with all our hearts and then say, "Lord, please accept these Ishmaels that I have produced." But God will say "No"! He will say "No" now and He will say "No" in eternity.

Dependence on the Holy Spirit

Let us test ourselves in one area - the area of prayer. Do we really know what it is to pray what the Bible calls "the prayer of faith"? It is only when we come to an end of ourselves that we can pray like that - for true prayer, as O. Hallesby has said, is simply confessing our helplessness to God. There is no credit in uttering beautiful, eloquent and impressive prayers. Such ordinary praying can be done by anyone - even by a heathen. But the prayer of faith can come only from one who has recognized his impotence and utter helplessness without God. This is what it means to "pray in the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:18); and that is the only type of prayer that brings an answer. As someone has said, what we need in our day is not more prayer but more answered prayer. Let us not fool ourselves, like the heathen, that God is pleased by our much praying. No. Prayer has no value before God, if it does not arise out of a recognition of our own impotence. So little of evangelical Christian work today is a work of faith. We have so many electronic gadgets and other aids to help us in our service for the Lord that many of us are, all unconsciously, depending on them, rather than on the Lord. It appears as though one does not need to be filled with the Holy Spirit, these days, to serve the Lord. All one needs is a tape-recorder, a few Christian movies, audio-visual aids, and some rich businessmen to provide financial support. If added to these, one also has a dynamic personality and eloquence or a trained singing voice, he can go out and "win souls for Christ"!

How far evangelical Christianity has drifted from the faith of the apostles! What a tragedy that the techniques of the business world have been brought into the sanctuary of God. Let us never be fooled by the apparent success of these methods. We can accumulate statistics of our "conversions", but we shall realize in eternity that they were spurious. Heaven does not rejoice over our labors, because we have not delivered souls from their self-centeredness, but merely entertained them and given them a good time.

God's way has not changed. Even today, we need to be emptied of our self-sufficiency and filled with the Spirit of God, if we are to produce "Isaacs" that please God. The Bible says, "Cursed be

the man who depends on man and who makes his self-sufficiency the arm on which he leans...for he shall be like a barren tree” (Jeremiah 17:5 - paraphrase). However much such a man may give the appearance of fruitfulness to others, he will stand in eternity like a barren tree, for his work originated in himself and in dependence on human energies and human resources. On the other hand, it says, “Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord and has made the Lord his confidence. He is like a tree planted along a riverbank, with its roots reaching deep into the water...its leaves stay green and it goes right on producing all its luscious fruit.” (Jeremiah 17:7-8 -LB) To change the illustration (to the one found in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15), what are we building with - wood, hay and straw, or gold, silver and precious stones? One ounce of gold is worth more than a ton of straw after the fire has done its work. Only genuine works of faith will abide in that day of testing. An end of ourselves In Edith Schaeffer's book `L'Abri', she recounts how God brought her husband Francis Schaeffer and his co-workers, again and again to a point of utter helplessness. More than once they found no way out of their impasse. The enemies of the gospel almost triumphed at many a point. In their impotence they looked to God to work on their behalf. And He did – not just once or twice, but repeatedly. This is the type of work – a work of faith – that will remain for eternity.

It is not the size of a work that impresses God. The world looks for size and numbers. But God is looking for works of faith - even if they be the size of mustard seeds. And so, when God brings us to an end of ourselves, hedging us in on every side and shattering our hopes, let us take heart! He is preparing us for greater usefulness by bringing us first to the place of impotence. He's equipping us to produce Isaacs. This was how Jesus prepared His apostles for His service. What do you think was the purpose of His training them for 3½ years? They were not being coached to write scholarly theses that would earn them doctorates in theology! That's how some people today feel they can be equipped to serve the Lord. But Jesus didn't train His apostles for that. None of the twelve disciples (except perhaps Judas Iscariot!) would have qualified for a basic theological degree (by our standards), even if they had tried. Jesus trained them to learn one lesson primarily - that, without Him they could do nothing (John 15:5). And, I tell you, a man who has learned that lesson is worth more than a hundred theological professors who haven't learnt that lesson.

Total dependence upon God is the mark of the true servant of God. It was true even of the Lord Jesus Christ, when He was on earth, as the Servant of Jehovah. In a prophetic reference to Him in Isaiah 42:1, God says, "Behold My Servant, whom I uphold." He does not stand in His own strength; He is upheld by God. Because Christ emptied Himself thus, God put His Spirit upon Him, as the verse goes on to say. It is only on those who have come to an end of themselves and emptied themselves of self-confidence and self-sufficiency, that God pours out His Spirit.

Look at some of the remarkable statements that Jesus made, which clearly show how emptied of self He was: “The Son can do nothing of Himself.....I can of Mine own self do nothing.....I do nothing of Myself.....I have not spoken of Myself; but the Father Who sent Me, He gave Me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak.....The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of Myself” (John 5:19; John 5:30; John 8:28; John 12:49; John 14:10).

Amazing! The perfect, sinless Son of God lived by faith. Emptied of all dependence upon His own self, He depended entirely on His Father. It is thus that God calls us to live too. When we are self-sufficient, we try to use God to help us serve Him. But when we are emptied, God can use us.

A.B.Simpson, that great man of God who founded the Christian and Missionary Alliance tells how he learnt this lesson in his own life. As a young pastor, he had struggled to serve God with his own energies until his health broke down. Finally he met with God in a way that changed his whole outlook on Christian service. He realized that he had been using God. Henceforth he would let God use him. He expressed his experience in the words of his well-known hymn:

“Once it was my working, His it hence shall be;

Once I tried to use Him, now He uses me.

Once the power I wanted, now the Mighty One;

Once for self I labored, now for Him alone.” This is what it means to trust God. And this was the first lesson that Abraham had to learn.

Worshipping God The second lesson that Abraham had to learn was the true meaning of worship. If trusting God means to be emptied of self-confidence and self-sufficiency, worshipping God means to be emptied of everything (including one’s possessions). As in Genesis 15:1-21, in Genesis 22:1-24 also, the paragraph begins with the phrase, “After these things....” Here too, as we look at the circumstances that immediately precede this hour of testing, we find Abraham in a triumphant position. The heathen had come to him and said, “Abraham, we’ve been watching your life and we know that God is with you in all that you do” (Genesis 21:22). No doubt they had heard of the miraculous way in which Sarah conceived, and were convinced that God was with this family. Ishmael had been sent away. Isaac was now the darling of Abraham’s heart. Abraham stood in grave danger, at this time, of losing his first love and devotion for God. And so God tested him again, and told him to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice.

Sacrifice and worship Have we ever heard God calling us to hard and difficult tasks like that? Or do we only hear Him comforting us with promises all the time? Oswald Chambers has said that if we have never heard God speaking a hard word to us, it is doubtful whether we have ever really heard God at all.

It is easy for our carnal minds to imagine that God is speaking to us with comforting promises all the time. Because we do not like the hard way, we can be deaf to God’s voice when He calls us to a difficult task. But Abraham had ears to hear, and a heart that was willing to obey anything that God commanded. He rose up early the next morning and went forth to obey God (Genesis 22:3). The record does not tell us what the old patriarch went through, during the previous night, after God had spoken to him. I am sure he did not sleep that night. He must have kept awake and gone and looked at his beloved son again and again; and the tears must have rolled down his eyes as he thought of what he had to do to him. How difficult it must have been for Abraham to offer up the son of his old age. But he was willing to obey God at any cost. Fifty years or so, earlier, he had put his hand to the plough when God called him in Ur; and he would not now look back. In the words of another, what Abraham was saying was:

"Keep me from looking back – The handles of my plough with tears are wet, The shears with rust are spoiled, and yet, and yet, My God! My God! Keep me from turning back"

There were no complaints and no questions. Abraham did not say, “Lord, I’ve been so faithful already. Why do you ask this hard thing also?” Neither did he say, “Lord, I’ve already sacrificed so

much - much more than all those around me. Why do you call me to sacrifice more?" Many believers often compare the sacrifices they have made with those that others have made. And they hesitate when God calls them to go further than others around them. But not so Abraham. There was no limit to his obedience and no end to his willingness to sacrifice for his God. No wonder he became the friend of God.

There was faith in Abraham's heart as he went up to sacrifice Isaac, that God would somehow raise his son from the dead. Hebrews 11:19 tells us that. God had already given Abraham a foretaste of resurrection-power in his own body and in Sarah's, through the birth of Isaac. Surely it would be no problem for such a God to bring back to life an Isaac who was slain on the altar. And so Abraham tells his servants when leaving them at the foot of Mount Moriah, "I and the lad will go yonder and worship and [we will both] come [back] again to you" (Genesis 22:5). That was a word of faith. He believed that Isaac would come back with him.

Notice too that he tells his servants, "We are going to worship God." He is not complaining that God is requiring too much from him, neither is he boasting about the marvelous sacrifice that he is about to make for God. No. Abraham did not belong to the category of those who subtly inform others about the sacrifices they make for God. Abraham said he was going to worship his God. And there we understand something of the real meaning of worship.

Remember how Jesus once said, "Abraham rejoiced to see My day; and he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56). Surely it must have been here on Mount Moriah that Abraham saw the day of Christ. In prophetic vision, the aged patriarch saw in his own action, a picture (faint though it be) of that day when God the Father Himself would lead His only begotten Son up Calvary's hill and offer Him up as a sacrifice for the sins of mankind. And that day on Mount Moriah, Abraham knew something of what it would cost the heart of God to save a wayward world. He came to a place of intimate fellowship with the heart of God that morning. Yes, he worshipped God - not just with beautiful words and hymns, but through costly obedience and sacrifice. A deep and intimate knowledge of God can come only through such obedience. We may accumulate plenty of accurate theological information in our minds; but real spiritual knowledge can come only when we give up everything to God. There is no other way. The Giver or His gift?

Abraham was being tested here as to whether he would love the Giver or His gifts more. Isaac was undoubtedly the gift of God, but Abraham was in danger of having an inordinate affection for his son. Isaac was becoming an idol who would cloud Abraham's spiritual vision. And so God intervened to save Abraham from such a tragedy. In his book 'The Pursuit of God', A.W.Tozer speaks of "the blessedness of possessing nothing". God was teaching Abraham on Mount Moriah the blessedness of being emptied of everything and possessing nothing. Before that day, Abraham had held Isaac with a possessive spirit. But after he laid his son on that altar and gave him up to God, he never possessed Isaac again. Yes, it is true that, God gave Isaac back to Abraham, and Abraham had him at home. But he never possessed Isaac as his own again. Isaac, thenceforth, was God's. And Abraham held Isaac as a steward holds the property of his master. In other words, he had Isaac, but he never again possessed him. This is to be our attitude to the things of this world. We can have them and use them. But we are never to cling to any one of them. Everything we own should have been placed on the altar and given completely to God. We must possess nothing. We can then keep only that which God gives back to us from the altar - and

we are to keep even such things only as stewards. Only then can we truly worship God. This is the pathway to the glory of the Christ-life. This principle does not apply to material things alone. It applies to spiritual gifts as well. It is possible for us to hold even the gifts of the Holy Spirit in a possessive way. Was not Isaac the gift of God? Why couldn't Abraham hold on to him then? To have to send away Ishmael was understandable, because he was not the promised seed. But Isaac's case was different. He was God's gift, produced in God's strength. Why should Abraham have to give him up as well? And so we may argue too. We can understand the need to give up our attachment to the things of the world. But surely, we feel, we can hold on to the gifts that God Himself has given us. But God says, "No. Lay even your spiritual gifts (which I have given you) on the altar and give them back to me, lest they fill your life and cloud your vision of Me, the Giver." God would have us delivered from any inordinate attachment to even the most sacred gifts of the Spirit that He has given us. He wants us to sacrifice even the "Isaacs" that we have received from Him and not cling to any one of them. Isn't it this that many believers have not seen? They have given up their Ishmaels but not their Isaacs. They have given up sinful things. But the gifts that God gave them they are now using to glorify themselves - like the prodigal son, who took his father's gifts and spent them on himself.

What is it that fills our vision - our gifts and our ministry, or the Giver Himself? This is what we need to ask ourselves constantly. We are most in danger when God has blessed us much and used us greatly. It is so easy at such times to lose the vision of God. We need to go back to the altar on Mount Moriah again and again and give our all to God repeatedly.

True worship begins when the Giver Himself fills our hearts and our vision. Only then can we safely use His gifts. Otherwise we shall abuse God's gifts and prostitute them to selfish uses. Isn't this the reason why there is so much misuse of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in our day? That which costs us everything

Abraham's devotion was tested that day when God asked him for Isaac. Had God asked Abraham for 10,000 sheep or 5,000 rams, that would have been easier for Abraham to offer. But one Isaac cost him everything, and he decided to offer nothing less than what God asked for. Abraham could have said the words that David said, years later, "I will never offer to my God that which costs me nothing" (2 Samuel 24:24). Yes, true worship involves our offering to God that which costs us everything.

Interestingly, it was on this very spot (where Abraham offered Isaac, on Mount Moriah), that David spoke the words quoted above (the threshing floor of Araunah was located here). It was here too that the Lord chose to build His temple, a thousand years later (2 Chronicles 3:1). God ordained His house to be built on the very spot where two of His servants (Abraham and David) had made costly sacrifices. That was where the fire fell from heaven and that was where the glory of God was seen (2 Chronicles 7:1). It is even so today. God builds His true church and manifests His power and glory where He finds men and women who are willing to deny themselves and offer Him that which costs them everything. Does our Christianity cost us something? Is our service for God an easygoing, cheap thing that does not cost us time, money or energy? Do our prayers cost us something? Have we drawn a limit to the sacrifices we are willing to make for God? Do we look for ease and comfort? If not, how can we expect the fire of God to fall upon us and the glory of God to be seen in our lives? Let us not deceive ourselves. The fullness of the Holy Spirit can result

only from a wholehearted giving up of ourselves to God. The way of the cross is painful. How painful it must have been for Abraham to face the thought of slaying his own son himself. It is not easy for us to see our children suffering as a result of the stand we have taken for God. That can be very costly. But blessed are we, if we are willing to suffer even that. God is no man's debtor. If we have honored Him, He will certainly honor us; and we shall find our children following God too, as Isaac followed in Abraham's footsteps. Isaac's willingness to be tied to the altar and to be slain was an indication of his own devotion to his father's God. Isaac was a strong, able-bodied, young man, and his aged father could never have tied him to the altar, if Isaac himself had not been willing. But Isaac had seen the reality of God in his father's life, and so he was willing to submit to anything that God desired. We see Isaac's devotion to God here just as much as we see Abraham's. And we see how true it was what the Lord had said that Abraham would "command his children and his household to keep the way of the Lord" (Genesis 18:19). On the other hand, many believers have lowered their high standards and compromised their Christian principles, for the sake of some material advantage for their children - only to see their children growing up to break their hearts and live for the world. Oh the tragedy of it!

Heaven's greatest rewards are reserved for those who have followed in Abraham's footsteps, and who like him have not withheld anything from God, whatever the cost.

I remember hearing the story of a young American couple who went to China as missionaries, before the Communists took over that land. They asked their mission board to assign them to some unreached area that had not yet been evangelized. Accordingly, they were posted to a little village in the interior, near Tibet. They labored faithfully there for several years, but did not see a single soul saved. God then gave them the gift of a baby daughter. And as that daughter grew up, they saw a miracle taking place before their eyes. They taught their little girl Bible-verses and choruses in the local language, and she in turn taught them to the children with whom she played. Those children went home and taught these verses to their parents. Soon one person was converted to Christ. This missionary couple continued to labor there for another 14 years (making a total of 21 years) without a furlough, and in that period seven more souls were saved. (God doesn't measure success by statistics as men do. This couple had spent 21 years to show 8 souls the way to eternal life. Surely their reward will be great when Christ returns). At the end of those 21 years, one day the father noticed a patch on the hand of his 14-year-old daughter. They took her to a doctor who told them that the girl had contracted leprosy. It broke their hearts to think of what their child had to suffer because of their devotion to God and to His call. The mother and daughter traveled back to America for the daughter's treatment. But the man himself stayed on in China. When asked why he did not go back to America with his family, he replied, "I would have liked to have gone home with my family. But back there in my mission station, there are eight souls who need to be instructed and fed. If someone else replaces me, it will take years before they develop confidence in him. And so I feel I should go back to them." It cost that family everything they had, to serve God. So many believers who have so much, give so little to God. But a few who have so little, give so much. And it is through this small and faithful remnant that God builds His church. The kingdom of God does not come through spectacular outward show, but through men of God such as that missionary. Some of these men may not be well-known on earth. But they will shine as stars in eternity. The apostle Paul came from a wealthy business family in Tarsus and could have chosen an easy life, when he was saved on the Damascus Road. He could have settled

down to a comfortable life as a Christian businessman in Tarsus. But he didn't do that. He went out to serve God and endured hardship. He got 195 stripes on his back, he was stoned and suffered shipwreck, and he faced many dangers in his service for God. If we were to ask him why he endured all that, he would say, "When I gave my life to the Lord, I determined that I would never offer Him any service that cost me nothing."

Two hundred years ago, the Moravian brethren formed one of the greatest missionary movements that the world has ever seen. Two of their number, heard of a slave colony in the West Indies and went there, willing to be sold as slaves for the rest of their lives, in order to preach the gospel to the slaves on that island. Two others heard of a leper-colony in Africa where no one was allowed to enter and return, for fear that the disease might spread. They volunteered to go into that leper colony for the rest of their lives, in order to present Christ to the inmates of the colony. The motto of those Moravian brethren was "to win for the Lamb that was slain the reward of His sufferings". They certainly knew what it was to worship God, by offering Him that which cost them everything.

How shallow and superficial our lives and labors are, compared with those of men like these. How much has it cost us to serve God - in terms of loss of money, comfort, reputation, honor and health? Do we realize that we do not really know what it is to worship God if our Christianity has not cost us everything that this world counts dear. Those who serve God wholeheartedly, giving up everything for Him, are the only ones who will have no regret in eternity. The Lord is calling today for those who will follow Him along the pathway of the cross - being emptied of everything.

Margaret Clarkson places this challenge so clearly before us in her hymn:

"So send I you – to labor unrewarded, To serve unpaid, unloved, unsought, unknown To bear rebuke, to suffer scorn and scoffing, So send I you – to toil for Me alone. So send I you – to loneliness and longing, With heart a-hungering for the loved and known; Forsaking home and kindred, friend and dear one, So send I you – to know My love alone." This is the way of power. And we need to be reminded of it again in a day when many think that there are short-cuts and once-for-all experiences that guarantee spiritual power. The way of the cross alone is the way of power. Jesus steadfastly set His face to go to the cross. What about us? We shall face this choice daily. If we are looking for three easy steps to the victorious life, then the Bible has no message for us. But if we are willing to pay the price of denying ourselves and taking up our cross daily and following Jesus, then we shall indeed know the power of the Spirit of God resting upon us for our life and service.

04.04. CHAPTER 4 THE BEAUTY OF THE CHRIST-LIFE

CHAPTER 4 THE BEAUTY OF THE CHRIST-LIFE

Christ came to give us “beauty for ashes” - the beauty of His own Divine life for the ashes of our self-life. We have seen some of the characteristics of the self-life. And we have also seen that the way of the cross – the way of being broken and being emptied - is the only pathway that can lead us out of the darkness of our own self-life into the full glory of the Christ-life. One day, when Christ returns and all shadows disappear, the glory will shine undimmed on all who have walked this pathway. But even now, here on earth, our lives can reflect something of that glory. That is why God has given us His Holy Spirit Who wants to fill our lives. The beauty of the Christ-life is brought to us through the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Before considering the characteristics of a Spirit-filled person, there are a few misunderstandings concerning the Holy Spirit and His ministry that need to be cleared up. The sovereignty of the Spirit

First of all, we must remember that the Holy Spirit is sovereign and works in varied ways. Jesus said, “Just as you can hear the wind but can’t tell where it comes from or where it will go next, so it is with the Spirit” (John 3:8 -LB). You can’t control the wind - either its speed or its direction. So too with the Holy Spirit. And yet many believers think that they can control Him and make Him work according to their rules and patterns. When the Second Person of the Trinity was here on earth, the Pharisees tried to tie Him down with their petty rules and traditions. But he refused to be locked up in their water-tight compartments. The descendants of the Pharisees in evangelical Christianity today are trying to tie down the Third Person of the Trinity to work within the confines of their traditions and their human understanding. But He refuses to work according to manmade patterns. He blows where He wishes. We can hear the sound of His working, but He will not be controlled or directed by us. We cannot say that He should work in the same way in other lives as He has worked in ours; neither should we expect Him to work today in the same way as He worked in days past. No. He is Sovereign. The best thing we can do is to set our face in the direction the wind is blowing and allow that wind to carry us along. The Holy Spirit cannot be tied down in the doctrinal compartment of any denomination. We shall find that He surprises us by the way He works. Both Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals need to recognize this! The Holy Spirit may at times manifest Himself like a whirlwind. There may be deep stirrings of the emotions and even physical reactions too. We must be willing to accept this. God spoke to Job out of a whirlwind (Job 38:1). But we also need to remember that the Spirit may at times blow like a gentle breeze. When Elijah heard the whirlwind, it says that God was not in the whirlwind (1 Kings 19:11). No. Every stirring of the emotions is not from God. And so we must be careful. To Elijah, God spoke in a gentle breeze (1 Kings 19:12). The Holy Spirit does not always blow like a tornado. Sometimes He does, but not always. We should not expect Him to blow like a whirlwind all the time in everyone’s life, just because He did so once in someone’s life. Equally, we should not expect Him to blow always like a gentle breeze. We do need His blowing as a tornado upon many of our

churches today, to uproot the things that are dishonoring to Christ therein. The wrapping should never be mistaken for the gift. The Holy Spirit Himself is the Gift of the Risen Lord to His church. When He falls upon people, it may be with shouts of Hallelujah, tears of joy and the gift of tongues, or it may be quietly, silently and without much emotion. Temperaments vary, and the Spirit of God (unlike many Christians) is willing to adapt Himself to each temperament. It is foolish therefore to expect that others should receive the Gift in the same wrapping in which we received Him - whether spectacular or commonplace. Only babies are taken up with the wrapping-paper in which a gift comes. Mature men recognize that the gift itself is more important than the wrapping. The Apostle Paul was converted through a vision of Jesus. But he did not preach that all needed a similar vision before they could be saved. No. He recognized that it was the inner reality that mattered, in whatever wrapping the gift might come. So too with the fullness of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit and God's Word

Secondly, we need to remember that the Holy Spirit always operates in line with the Word of God - for He Himself has written that Word, and He does not change. We see this truth in the very first paragraph of Scripture. When darkness covered the earth, the Spirit of God brooded upon it, and the Word of God went forth - "Let there be light". And it was the joint operation of the Holy Spirit and His creative Word that brought light into the darkness and brought fullness and form where previously there had been emptiness and shapelessness (Genesis 1:1-3). The new birth is attributed to the implantation of the Word of God in us (1 Peter 1:24), as well as to the operation of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). Sanctification, likewise is the result of the working of God's Word and of the Holy Spirit in our lives (Compare John 17:17 with 2 Thessalonians 2:13). In the same way, the fullness of the Holy Spirit and being filled with the Word of God go together. This becomes clear when we compare Ephesians 5:18-33; Ephesians 6:1-9, with Colossians 3:15-21. In the Ephesian passage, we are told that giving thanks, praising God and submitting to one another in Christ-like home relationships, is the result of being filled with the Spirit. Whereas in the Colossian passage, these very same things are said to be the result of being filled with the Word of God.

We need to recognize this truth if we are to be balanced Christians. A steam-locomotive needs not only steam in order to move forward, but also rail-tracks. We need the steam of God's Spirit if we are to make spiritual progress, but we also need the rails of God's Word to keep us from going astray. One is not more important than the other. Both are equally important. Some who claim to be full of steam, have ignored the rails and got stuck in the mud. Placing a premium on experience, they have not been careful to test everything by God's Word, and as a result have gone off the track. Like a derailed engine blowing its whistle furiously, many of them make a lot of noise in their meetings, but there is no spiritual progress - no growth in Christlikeness - in their lives.

Others have gone to the opposite extreme. Although they have kept on the rails, they have despised the need for fullness of steam in the engine (or have imagined that they have the fullness when they haven't), and they are stuck too. They emphasize the importance of the Word of God and are careful to cross every `t` and dot every `i` in it. They keep admiring and polishing the rails. But they don't recognize that they need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. They are fundamental in their doctrines, all right - the rails are perfectly straight - but there is no steam to move the engine. They are dead right in their doctrines, but they are also both dead and right! Our limited knowledge

Thirdly, we must recognize that even the best among us do not know everything about the Holy Spirit and His workings. Some Christians give the impression that they have all the answers concerning everything that relates to the Holy Spirit. They have analyzed the Biblical teaching on the subject and neatly pigeon-holed every verse. I'm terribly wary of such people for I know they are wrong. We do not know everything. We know only in part - and especially when it concerns the ministry of the Spirit (See 1 Corinthians 13:9; 1 Corinthians 13:12). We need to acknowledge that our finite, sinful minds are not able to comprehend the greatness and the vastness of God the Holy Spirit fully.

A.W.Tozer has said that the most profound statement in the Bible is, "Oh Lord God, Thou knowest" (Ezekiel 37:3)! We all come to a point in our understanding of the things of God where we have to say, "Lord God, I know this much, but there is so much beyond this that I don't know. I have come only to the fringe of truth." As Job said, "These are but the outskirts of His ways....How small a whisper do we hear of Him! But the thunder of His power who can understand" (Job 26:14 -ASV). Such an attitude will save us from a lot of carnal dogmatism on matters concerning the Holy Spirit, on which the Bible does not give us clear instruction. It will also give us a greater tolerance of other believers who do not see eye-to-eye with us on the Spirit's ministry. They may be wrong - but we may be too! That which is clearly revealed in Scripture is for our instruction. Beyond that we are not to speculate (Deuteronomy 29:29). No short-cuts

Fourthly, remember that there is no short-cut to the Spirit-filled life - no easy formula that guarantees success. In our day, when push-buttons have replaced hard manual labor, and when man has generally accepted a philosophy of easy, comfortable living, Christians can all unconsciously bring this attitude into spiritual matters as well. The result is that we can think that there must be some simple formula for being filled with the Holy Spirit - "Take these three steps - and lo and behold, you are filled!" But we don't find any such formula in the Bible. We must beware of trying to reduce the Holy Spirit's operation in a person's life into a set of formulas. The fullness of the Spirit is not a mechanical matter but a matter of life - and spiritual life cannot be expressed in formulas.

Don't boast that you are filled

Fifthly, a fact to be noticed in the entire New Testament is that although certain people are referred to as being 'full of the Spirit' (Acts 6:5; Acts 11:24), no-one ever testified to being full of the Spirit himself.

I am not referring now to the baptism in the Spirit (or 'receiving the Spirit', as it is called in some passages), which is the initial experience of being filled with the Spirit. Concerning this, the apostles expected every believer to have a clear testimony as to whether he had received the Spirit or not (See Acts 19:2 and Galatians 3:2). But in Ephesians 5:18, Paul exhorted the Ephesian Christians (who had already been baptized in the Spirit) to "be being filled with the Spirit" (literal translation) - in other words, to be filled with the Spirit continuously. Those who walk in the Spirit in this continuous fullness alone can be referred to as men and women "full of the Spirit". But this is something for others to notice, not for us to testify to. When Moses' face shone with the glory of God, others saw it, but he himself was ignorant of it (Exodus 34:29-30). To be full of the Spirit is to be full of the Spirit of Christ; and it is by the fruit of Christ-likeness in our character that others will know that we are Spirit-filled. There is no need for us to testify concerning this, for our life will

speak louder than our words.

Paul's example

There is perhaps no clearer description of the Spirit-filled life than in Paul's statement in Galatians 2:20, "I am crucified with Christ. It is no longer I but Christ that lives in me." For what is the purpose of the fullness of the Spirit if not to reproduce the life of Jesus in us? And so the measure in which our self-life is crucified and the Christ-life manifested in us, is the true measure of our being full of the Holy Spirit.

Paul told the Galatian Christians, "Brethren, I beseech you, be as I am" (Galatians 4:12). He was one who could ask others to follow his example. He did not have to say, "Don't look at me, but look at Christ." He repeatedly urged others to look at the example of his own life and to follow him as he followed Christ (See 1 Corinthians 4:16; 1 Corinthians 11:1; Php 3:17). He had such a satisfying Christian experience, that even when in chains, he could tell King Agrippa, "In spite of all that you have in the world, O king, I only wish that you could be as I am (spiritually)" (Acts 26:29). He was not boasting, for he said elsewhere, "By the grace of God, I am what I am" (1 Corinthians 15:10).

Let us then look at the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul to see some of the characteristics of the Christ-life. We shall consider eight passages from Scripture where Paul describes his life and service, using this very same phrase, "I am".

We shall look first at the characteristics of Spirit-filled service and then at the characteristics of the Spirit-filled life.

Spirit-filled service

There are four things that I would like to mention concerning Spirit-filled service, from the words of the Apostle Paul. A love-slave

First of all, Spirit-filled service is the service of a love-slave. In Acts 27:23, Paul says, "...the God whose I am and whom I serve". He was a love-slave of his God. He retained no right to his own life. He had given everything to his Master. The only proper basis for our consecration is recognizing the fact that we belong wholly to God in the first place. Giving ourselves to God out of gratitude for what He has done for us, though good in itself, is not the true basis for Christian consecration. Love for Christ can be the impelling motive in our service for the Lord. But the basis on which we should dedicate our lives to God, is the fact that He has purchased us on the cross. We are therefore now God's own property, and have no right to ourselves. When slaves served their masters in olden times, it was not primarily because they loved their masters, but because they were their master's property! And so, when a person gives his entire life to God, he is not doing God a great favor. No! He is only returning to God what he had stolen from Him. If I were to steal a man's money and later, convicted of my sin, were to return it to him, I would certainly not be doing that man a favor. I would go to him as a repentant thief. And that is the only proper attitude in which we can approach God when we come to give our lives to Him. God has purchased us. When we recognize that, we arrive at the only proper basis for consecration.

Paul was a love-slave of the Lord. Like the Hebrew slave, who could go free in the seventh year of his service, but chose to continue in that service because he loved his master (Exodus 21:1-6), Paul served his Lord. He was not a hired servant who worked for wages, but one who served

without any rights of his own. The service of a love-slave has been beautifully summed up by someone in the following poem:

"I'm but a slave!

I have no freedom of my own;

I cannot choose the smallest thing – Nor e'en my way.

I'm a slave!

Kept to do the bidding of my Master –

He can call me night or day. Were I a servant, I could claim wages –

Freedom sometimes, anyway. But I was bought - Blood was the price my Master paid for me, And I am now His slave – And evermore will be.

He takes here, He takes me there, He tells me what to do;

I just obey, that's all –

I trust Him too!" This is what it means to be a love-slave.

God is looking for those who are so yielded to Him, that they will look to Him always to see what He wants them to do - and not busy doing what they feel they should do for God. A slave does not go around doing whatever he feels like. No. The slave asks his master, "Master, what do you want me to do?" And he does what he is told. The Bible says, "The most important thing about a servant is that he does just what his master tells him to" (1 Corinthians 4:2 -LB). As someone has put it so beautifully, this is the type of man the Lord is looking for:

"I'm seeking for one who will wait and watch For My beckoning Hand, My eye; Who will work in My manner, the work I give, And the work I give not, pass by. And oh the joy that is brought to Me When one such as this I can find, A man who will do all My will – Who is set To study His Master's mind."

"I sought for a man," the Lord once said, "but I found none" (Ezekiel 22:30). He is looking for love-slaves today. But He finds so few.

Evangelistic passion - not emotional excitement

Secondly, Spirit-filled service, is a service that recognizes its debt to others. Paul said, "I am a debtor to the Greeks (civilized) and to the barbarians (uncivilized)" (Romans 1:14). God has given us a treasure to share with the world. We are like post-office employees who have been entrusted with a large amount of money to be given to various people as money-orders. Such an employee remains in debt to those others until he has finished paying off to each one his due. He may have thousands of dollars with him, but not one cent of it is his. He is a debtor to many. The Apostle recognized a similar debt when God entrusted him with the message of the gospel. He knew it had to be given out. And he also knew that he would remain in debt to others until he had given them the message of salvation. After twenty-five years spent in preaching the good news, Paul still says, "I am a debtor," and he tells the Roman Christians that he is ready to come to Rome to clear his

debt to the people of Rome. Notice the three "I am"s of Paul in Romans 1:14-16 : "I am a debtor...I am ready...I am not ashamed to preach the gospel".

Spirit-filled service is outgoing. Recognizing its debt to others, it is always ready to go and discharge that debt. The evidence of the Spirit's fullness and the beauty of the Christ-life are seen not in thrilling emotional experiences but in a passion in the heart that says (as Mrs. F.C. Durham has so wonderfully put it):

"I am Thy slave, Thy bondsman; nevermore Will I be free from this fierce urge within, To spread from race to race, and shore to shore The joyful news of pardon for man's sin.

Give me the souls of men, or else I die, Give me the love that counteth not the cost, Give me that faith all barriers to defy, Give me the joy of bringing home the lost."

Spirit-filled service has an evangelistic passion and is perpetually outgoing. It is concerned with the needs of others and not its own satisfaction. Christ Himself never once sought His own satisfaction (Romans 15:3).

It needs to be emphasized in our day that the Spirit's fullness and His gifts are not given for our emotional satisfaction. Much less are they given for exhibition. "Exhibitionism", A.W.Tozer has said, "is common to the kindergarten!". God wants us to be spiritually mature, and when we are, our passion will be neither emotionalism nor exhibitionism but evangelism. In his book, *The Spirit of Holiness*, E.L. Cattell mentions some of the perils of emotionalism - seeking emotional excitement instead of God, an adverse witness, wasted energy and false holiness.

Those who major on emotionalism will usually consider the Holy Spirit to be present in a meeting only when the emotional fervor of the singing and praying reaches a certain pitch and the noise reaches a certain decibel level! This is living by feelings and not by faith. It is worshipping the emotions instead of God. God dwells in our spirit, not in our emotions.

Emotionalism can also hinder our testimony to the world around us. Paul warns us that unbelievers coming into an emotional church meeting (where everyone is "speaking in tongues") will consider all of them to be mad (1 Corinthians 14:23). God is a God of order, not of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33). Emotional Christians dub others as unspiritual just because those others don't accept their frenzied behavior as manifestations of the Holy Spirit. "Grace accepts torture", says Cattell, "but it never tortures others"!!

Emotionalism also becomes a substitute for service very often. Instead of helping others, we can merely keep enjoying our "emotional highs" in the meetings! Our energies must be directed toward "going around doing good and delivering people from the bondage of Satan" as Jesus did, when he was filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:38) - and not to satisfying our emotions.

Counterfeit emotional "thrills" can also deceive us about our spiritual state. If you have offended your wife or some other person, God will want you to apologize to her/him first before fellowship with God can be restored. But Satan can give you such a nice feeling in a high-pitched emotional meeting or in a "release in tongues" that he can deceive you into believing that you are in communion with God, when you cannot be, for the main issue has not been settled. It may be more exciting to speak in tongues. But God expects you to take the humiliating step of asking forgiveness from the wounded person first. Otherwise Satan has fooled you with an illusive

holiness.

I am not devaluing our emotions or the genuine gift of tongues. God has created our emotions and He doesn't want us to be like dead stones. He is also the One Who gave the church the gift of tongues and there is a place for that too. But let us never forget that Spirit-filled service is always outgoing, thinking of its debt to others, and not just satisfying itself with experiences in the emotional realm.

We must also remember two important facts:

(i) Any experience received in an emotionally tense meeting may have been self-induced, and not from God at all.

(ii) Any experience that makes a person lose control of himself cannot be from the Holy Spirit, for the fruit of the Spirit is self-control (Galatians 5:22-23)..

God does not want us to live depending on our feelings. He wants us to live by faith. This is why God sometimes allows us to feel spiritually dry. Such feelings of dryness are not always an indication of sin in our life. They are often God's attempts to shake us out of our dependence on feelings.

We need to walk carefully in these days, for the Devil is leading many astray through counterfeit gifts and an over-emphasis on emotions. If we want to be delivered from Satan's snares, let us remember that the beauty of the Christ-life is seen in a life that seeks to bless others. Jesus came from heaven to earth not seeking anything for Himself, but only to bless others.

Human insufficiency

Thirdly, Spirit-filled service is a service that is conscious of human insufficiency. Notice Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 10:1, "I am base among you" - or, in other words, "I don't have an impressive personality."

Tradition tells us that the Apostle Paul was only 4 feet 10 inches in height and bald. He had a hooked nose and he was probably beset by an eye-disease. He obviously did not have a movie-star-like personality. The success of his labors did not depend on any human factor, for there was nothing impressive about his appearance or his speech.

Concerning his preaching, Paul writes to the Corinthians, "I was with you in fear and much trembling" (1 Corinthians 2:3). When he preached, he felt conscious of his weakness, rather than of the power of God flowing through him. This is Spirit-filled service - for remember, that a church was established in heathen Corinth as a result of Paul's preaching. When the Spirit of God speaks through a man, the man himself is not usually conscious of being God's mouthpiece. I'm always wary of those folk who are so sure, when they stand in the pulpit, that God is speaking through them (and who preface their pronouncements with a "Thus saith the Lord..."). My experience with such people has been that God has never spoken through them at all. They've just had conceited ideas of being prophetic voices. The man through whom God speaks is usually not conscious of that fact at all. The Apostle Paul says in one of his writings, "I think I am giving you counsel from God's Spirit when I say this" (1 Corinthians 7:40 -LB). He was not sure whether God was speaking through him. Yet we know that it was God speaking through Paul, for God has included it in

inspired Scripture. But Paul himself was unaware of it.

Yes, Spirit-filled service is one that is conscious of human insufficiency. As Paul says, "When I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10). The Spirit-filled servant of God goes again and again to God, like the man in the parable, saying, "I have nothing to give others. Please give me the living bread" (Luke 11:5-8). The Lord's servant is perpetually conscious of his own insufficiency.

Let us not have any mistaken ideas of Spirit-filled service. It has no great awareness of God's power, but on the contrary of fear and uncertainty. It is only long after the labors are all over that, on looking back, there will be the assurance that God did indeed work through us.

Fulfilling our calling

Fourthly, Spirit-filled service is a service that fulfils God's specific calling. In Colossians 1:23; Colossians 1:25, Paul says, "I am made a minister", and in 1 Timothy 2:7, "I am ordained an apostle". Paul had been ordained by the nail-pierced hands of his Savior, and not by any man. It was God Who had called Paul to be an apostle. This calling, he says in Colossians 1:25, was given to him. It was God's gift - not something that he had achieved or earned. He also says in the same verse that this calling was given to him to serve others. It was a stewardship entrusted to him by God for the work of building up the church.

God has a specific calling for each of us. It is futile asking God to make us into something that He has not called us to be - for the Holy Spirit decides what gift each of us should have. Paul was called to be an apostle. But not everyone has such a calling. What we do need to seek God's face for, is power to do that which He has called us to do. "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you fulfill it," was Paul's advice to Archippus (Colossians 4:17).

God does not put square pegs into round holes. He knows what His church needs at a particular time in a particular place, and He prepares each of us, (if we are submissive) for a specific task - which may be quite different from what we ourselves want to do. "Is everyone an apostle? Of course not. Is everyone a preacher? No. Are all teachers? Does everyone have the power to do miracles? Can everyone heal the sick? Of course not. Does God give all of us the ability to speak in languages we've never learned [tongues]?...No" (1 Corinthians 12:29-30 - LB). But God has placed each of these gifts in the Body of Christ. The important thing is for us to recognize our gift and calling - and to exercise that gift and fulfill that calling. Spirit-filled service is service that fulfils that specific calling which God gives us.

If there is one gift that the New Testament specifically encourages us to seek, it is the gift of prophecy (1 Corinthians 14:39). This is perhaps the most needed gift in the church today. A prophetic ministry is one that edifies (strengthens and builds-up), exhorts (rebukes and challenges) and consoles (comforts and encourages) (1 Corinthians 14:3). We need to pray that God will give us prophets in our churches, who will speak the truth of God, without fear or favor - men of a different caliber from the professional religious scribes, who are more interested in their salary, status and popularity. May the Lord help each of us to seek His face earnestly to find out what our calling is. The Spirit-filled life Let us look at four characteristics of the Spirit-filled life - again from the life of the Apostle Paul.

Perfect contentment The Spirit-filled life is, first of all, a life of perfect contentment. In Php 4:11, Paul says, "In whatever state I am, I am content." And such contentment brings with it fullness of joy and peace. Hence Paul speaks of joy and peace in verses 4 and 7 of the same chapter.

We can praise God only when we are perfectly content with all His dealings with us. If we believe in a God who is sovereign and Who can therefore make everything that befalls us work together for our good, (Romans 8:28) then we can be truly content in all circumstances. Then we can praise the Lord, like Habakkuk, even when the trees in our garden don't bear fruit, when our flock dies and when we have suffered heavy financial loss - or in any situation (Habakkuk 3:17-18). Ephesians 5:18-20 indicates that the result of the infilling of the Holy Spirit is an outflow of praise to God. The Apostle Paul could rejoice even when he was locked up in prison, with his feet in stocks (Acts 16:25). Even there, he was content and found nothing to complain about. This is one of the first marks of the Spirit-filled life. When murmuring is found in a Christian, it is an indication that he, like the Israelites who murmured against God in the wilderness has still not entered the promised land of victory.

Growth in Holiness

Secondly, the Spirit-filled life is a life of growth in holiness. As a man's own life increases in holiness so does his consciousness of the absolute holiness of God. The two go together. In fact, the latter is one of the tests of whether a person really has the former.

Twenty-five years after his conversion, Paul says, "I am the least of the apostles" (1 Corinthians 15:9). Five years subsequently, he says, "I am less than the least of all the saints" (Ephesians 3:8). Still a year later he says, "I am (notice, it is not "I was" but "I am") the chief of sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15). Do you see his progression in holiness in those statements? The closer Paul walked with God, the more he was conscious of the corruption and wickedness of his flesh. He recognized that no good thing could be found in his flesh (Romans 7:18). In Ezekiel 36:26-27; Ezekiel 36:31, God says, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you...Then you will loathe yourselves for all the evils you did." There we see that one proof that we have got a new heart from God is that we loathe ourselves. Only a man who hates and detests his flesh will be able to fulfill the command in Php 2:3 to "esteem others as more important" than himself. Having seen his own corruption, he will no longer despise anyone else.

He will also be ready to confess failure immediately and will be willing to call sin, sin. The Spirit-filled man does not merely seek to give others an impression that he is growing in holiness, but will actually be doing so. He will not testify of experiences that supposedly made him holy, or try to convince others of his theology of sanctification. He will have such holiness in his life that others will come to him, of their own accord, and ask him the secret of his life. He will have what J.B.Phillips translates as, "the holiness which is no illusion" (Ephesians 4:24)

It makes no difference what our doctrine of holiness is. True holiness comes only to the man who seeks after it with all his heart, and not to the one who merely has the correct teaching in his head.

There have been godly men in past centuries (like John Fletcher) whose understanding of the doctrine of holiness led them to believe that they were 'entirely sanctified' and who called their unconscious sins 'mistakes'. There have been other godly men (like David Brainerd) who called their unconscious sins 'sins', and who bemoaned their sinfulness and their lack of devotion to God

constantly - throughout their earthly lives. But both these groups of men may have been equally saintly in God's eyes, despite the radical difference in the way they evaluated their own lives. Their different temperaments and their differing understandings of the doctrine of sanctification accounted for their differing estimate of their own hearts. The secret of holiness is discovered not through a study of Greek words and tenses in the New Testament but through a wholehearted and sincere desire to please God. God looks at our hearts, not at our brains! In any case, any growth in holiness, will always be accompanied, as it was with Paul, by an increasing awareness of one's own sinfulness in the sight of God. A crucified life

Thirdly, the Spirit-filled life is a life that is crucified. Paul said, "I am crucified with Christ" (Galatians 2:20). We have already seen something of the meaning of the cross in the last two chapters. The way of the cross is the way of the fullness of the Spirit. The Spirit will always lead us like He led Jesus to the cross. The Spirit and the cross are inseparable. The cross is a symbol of weakness, shame and death. The Apostle Paul had fears, perplexities, sorrows and tears in his life (See 2 Corinthians 1:8; 2 Corinthians 4:8; 2 Corinthians 6:10; 2 Corinthians 7:5). He was considered a fool and a fanatic. He was often treated like dirt and garbage by others (1 Corinthians 4:13). All this is not incongruous with the Spirit's fullness. On the contrary, the Spirit-filled man will find God leading him farther and farther, down the pathway of humiliation and death to himself. The Spirit-filled man is one who does not care for the honor of men. He accepts humiliation and reproach gladly. He glories in nothing but the cross (Galatians 6:14). He does not glory in his gifts or abilities or even his deeper life experiences. He glories only in dying to himself perpetually. The cross is also the symbol of Divine love. God's love for man was manifested in God dying on a cross for men. Such love characterizes the Spirit-filled man as well. Between him and every other person, there is a cross on which he dies to himself in order to love the other. This is the real meaning of love.

Watchman Nee tells the story of two Christian farmers in China who had their fields halfway up a hill and who would get up early in the morning and water their fields. Some other farmers, whose fields were lower down the hill, came one night and dug a hole in the irrigation channels of the upper fields and let all the water flow down to their fields. This happened for seven nights in succession and the two Christians wondered what to do. They finally decided that as believers they would show the other farmers the love of Christ. And so they got up the next morning and watered the fields of those farmers first, and then watered their own. They put a cross between them and the other farmers and died to their own rights on it. After they did this for two or three days, the non-Christian farmers called to apologize and said, "If this is Christianity, then we want to hear more about it."

Jesus said that when the Holy Spirit came upon His disciples, they would receive power to be His witnesses. The word "witness" in the original Greek, is "martus", (which is translated as "martyr" in Acts 22:20 and in Revelation 2:13; Revelation 17:6). So the literal meaning of Acts 1:8, is that when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples, they would receive power to be martyrs - martyrs, not just in the sense of dying once on a stake, but martyrs who would die to themselves daily. And so, a Spirit-filled witness is one who lives a crucified life.

Continuous enlargement

Fourthly, the Spirit-filled life is a life that is continuously seeking greater degrees of fullness. "I am pressing on," says Paul, nearly thirty years after his conversion, and as he was drawing to the end of his life (Php 3:14). He still has not attained. He is seeking a still greater degree of the fullness of the Spirit of God in his life, and is therefore straining every spiritual muscle toward this goal.

"I am not perfect (complete)," he says in Php 3:12. But in verse 15, he seems to say the exact opposite: "Let us who are perfect (complete) be thus minded." This is the paradox of the Spirit-filled life - complete, and yet not complete; in other words, full and yet desiring a greater degree of fullness. The Spirit-filled state is not a static one. There are greater and greater degrees of fullness. The Bible says that the Holy Spirit leads us from one degree of glory to another (2 Corinthians 3:18) - or, in other words, from one degree of fullness to another. A cup can be full of water; so can a bucket; so can a tank and so can a river. But there is a vast difference between the fullness of a cup and the fullness of a river. The newborn convert can be filled with the Spirit immediately on conversion. The Apostle Paul too was a Spirit-filled man at the end of his life. But there is a vast difference between the fullness of the newborn convert and the fullness of the mature Apostle. The former is like a full cup whereas the latter was like a full river. The Holy Spirit is constantly seeking to enlarge our capacity, so that He can fill us to a greater degree. This is where the cross comes in. There can be no enlargement in our lives if we avoid the pathway of the cross. This is why the Corinthian Christians were so shallow. They gloried in gifts and ignored the cross. And so Paul exhorts them again and again in his two epistles, to accept the cross in their lives. He exhorts them to be enlarged thereby (2 Corinthians 6:13).

If we accept the cross consistently in our lives, we shall find our cup becoming a bucket, our bucket becoming a tank, our tank becoming a river and the river becoming many rivers. At each stage, as our capacity enlarges, we will need to be filled again. Thus will be fulfilled in us the promise of the Lord Jesus, "Rivers of living water shall flow from the inmost being of anyone who believes in me (He was speaking of the Holy Spirit)" (John 7:38-39 -LB). This also explains why Paul exhorts the Ephesian Christians to "be continuously being filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). Paul obviously never believed in a once-for-all experience of being filled with the Spirit. What he is referring to here is a continuous enlargement of capacity for greater degrees of fullness.

Paul himself accepted the cross always. He says in 2 Corinthians 4:10, "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body [in ever-increasing degree]." One aspect of the cross that he accepted was the disciplining of his bodily appetites. The fullness of the Spirit is never a substitute for discipline and hard work. Paul still needed to pommel his body and bring it into subjection. He says, "Like an athlete I punish my body, treating it roughly, training it to do what it should, not what it wants to" (1 Corinthians 9:27 -LB). He disciplined his eyes in what they read and looked at, his ears in what they listened to, and his tongue in what it spoke. He disciplined his life in every area. Thus he was enlarged.

Thank God for the crises He gives us in our lives. But let us not forget that every crisis must lead to a process. Christ is not only the Door, He is also the Way. If we enter in through the narrow gate, we have to walk the narrow way. Let us never be guilty of emphasizing the crisis to the exclusion of the process. The new birth is a crisis, but spiritual life in the present tense is the important thing, not just the memory of a date in the past. Some are unable to remember the date when the crisis

of the new birth took place. But we don't say that a man is dead merely because he can't remember his birthday! And yet, alas, to some Christians, the testimony of an experience is the only test of life! In relation to the fullness of the Spirit too, the important thing is the present tense reality of it, manifested in Christlike living and service. The memory of an experience in the past, however wonderful that may have been, is, by itself, of no avail.

God is looking for men and women who will never be content with mere experiences and "blessings," but who will take up the cross daily and follow Jesus and thus manifest in their lives and in their service the reality of those words, "It is no longer I, but Christ that lives in me." This, and this alone is the Spirit-filled life.

"Not I but Christ be honored, loved, exalted, Not I but Christ be seen, be known, be heard; Not I but Christ in ev'ry look and action, Not I but Christ in ev'ry thought and word Oh to be saved from myself, dear Lord, Oh to be lost in Thee, Oh that it may be no more I But Christ that lives in me."
(Selected)

Amen and Amen.

05.0.1. Day of Small Beginnings

Day of Small Beginnings by

Zac Poonen Testimony of Zac Poonen

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05.01. CHAPTER 01 Listening to Gods Voice

CHAPTER 1 Listening to God's Voice

Large doors swing on small hinges. God tests us in many areas many times, before He commits any important ministry to us. He tests us to see if we are faithful in the little things before He commits greater things to us. As with Adam and Eve, God asks for obedience to His voice first of all.

One of my earliest memories of obeying the voice of the Lord was when I was 15 years old, soon after I had joined the National Defence Academy at Khadakvasla (Pune) for training to be a Naval officer. The year was 1955 and I was on vacation (from the Academy), with my parents who lived in New Delhi. One Sunday evening, my younger brother and I had gone to attend a church service. After the service, at about 8 pm, both of us were waiting at the bus stand to catch the bus to return home. Suddenly a thought began to grow in my mind that I should witness to someone about Christ. I had heard the good news of the gospel again that evening and felt I must share it with someone, before going to bed that night. But I was not sure whether this was a prompting from the Lord or just my own thought. In any case it was getting late - and I needed to get back home soon. In the distance, I saw the lights of a bus coming towards us. I told the Lord silently, "If that is NOT the bus to my home, then I will take it as a sign from You that I should witness to someone before going home. If it IS the bus for my home, then I will take the bus and go home." The bus drew near and I saw that it was NOT the bus I had to take. The sign I had asked for was fulfilled. So I told my younger brother that I had to go somewhere else before coming home and asked him to go home alone. I then walked to a nearby park hoping that I would meet someone there whom it would be easy to witness to – because this was the first time I was venturing out to witness for the Lord in a public place, alone.

I saw an old man sitting on a bench in the park and went and sat next to him. I made casual conversation with him for a few minutes in Hindi and soon became bold enough to talk to him about eternal things. I told him about the love of God for man and how Christ died for our sins and the simple gospel message that I knew. He listened to me patiently. Since it was God Who had put an urge within me to witness that night, I assume that He must have had this man in mind to reach with the gospel. I hope I shall meet this man in heaven one day. That was my first venture at witnessing openly and all by myself in a public place. God tested me to see if I would obey the inner promptings of His Spirit. That was "the day of small beginnings" (Zechariah 4:10). Since then God has given me the opportunity to preach His Word to crowds of many thousands of people in many parts of the world. But it all began with a small act of obedience one Sunday evening in New Delhi. Be sensitive to the voice of the Holy Spirit. You will never know until you stand before the Lord how much you missed whenever you did NOT obey that voice.

05.02. CHAPTER 02 Assurance of Salvation

CHAPTER 2 Assurance of Salvation

Some believers can remember very clearly the exact date and time when they were born again. But I cannot. In fact I don't even know in which year I was born again. That does not mean that being born again is a gradual process. It is not. Passing from death to life in Christ takes place in an instant. But many people like me who were born and brought up in God-fearing Christian homes, cannot pinpoint the exact moment when that miracle took place. That is because many who are like me, ask the Lord to come into their heart, many, many times and we can't say which of those times was the real one.

If I remember rightly, I asked the Lord to come into my heart for the first time, when I was about 13. But I did not know whether He had come in or not, because I did not feel or experience anything, when I prayed. So I kept on asking the Lord to come into my heart again and again – perhaps over a hundred times during the next few years – but each time I felt nothing! And so I did not know whether I was saved or not. As long as I was at home, the restraints imposed on me by my parents kept me from many worldly forms of entertainment like the cinema etc., But once I joined the military academy and the Indian Navy, I was on my own and such restraints were gone. Gradually I became a worldly Christian who went to church only as a matter of habit – and not out of any conviction. But one good thing came out of my trying out the world's entertainments. I discovered that everything the world had to offer was empty and hollow – incapable of satisfying me in a lasting way. One day, in July 1959, as I was sitting in my room in the Naval Base at Cochin and thinking about all this and reading the Bible, I came to John 6:37, where Jesus said, "I will certainly not cast out anyone who comes to me". I had read that verse many times before. But that day it struck me forcefully - and I believed it. I knew that I had come to the Lord many times. I suddenly realized that if I had done my part, Jesus must have done His part – He must have received me. It was then that I realized that unbelief was the greatest sin (See John 16:9). For if I did not believe God's word, I was then making Him out to be a liar - and that was the greatest insult anyone could give to God. So, after 6 years of being tossed about, I believed - and I was sure that I was saved. What did I learn from my experience? Two things.

First of all, that when you are not sure of your salvation, it is very easy to get discouraged and to backslide.

Secondly, that faith is a gift of God. I was 19 years old when I first got assurance of my salvation. More than 46 years have passed since that day, but I have never once doubted my salvation. I have doubted many other things in these years, but I have never doubted my salvation. I dropped an anchor that day on the ground of God's infallible Word and my ship has never drifted since then. I have been battered by many fierce storms in these years, and my ship has swung wildly at times, but my anchor has held. How can I explain that? I can only say that God gave me the grace to "believe" His Word that day. Even faith is a gift of God. So we cannot glory even in our faith. All we can do is humbly glorify God.

05.03. CHAPTER 03 A Help In Time Of Need

CHAPTER 3 A Help In Time Of Need In July 1959, I was living in the Naval Base at Cochin. I had just been commissioned as a Naval Officer. I had also received the assurance of my salvation in the same month, and had decided to live totally for the Lord.

One evening, two of my fellow-Naval-officers came to me and told me that a good movie was going to be shown that evening in the Naval Base cinema theatre, and suggested that we all go together to see it. I had often gone with them to the movies previously. But now that I had been born again, I had decided that I would not go to such movies any more. The Lord had also taken away from my heart the desire to go to the cinema. But I did not have the courage to tell my friends that I was now a born-again Christian. So I went with them. But all along the way to the theatre, a constant cry was going up from my heart to the Lord to somehow save me from this situation. When we reached the cinema theatre, we saw a notice pasted on the front wall, saying that because the reel of the movie had not arrived, the movie scheduled for that evening was cancelled. My friends were utterly disappointed as we returned home, but I was thrilled. I was overjoyed that God had done a miracle for me. This incident strengthened my faith greatly and I realized that I did indeed have a Father in heaven who would be “a very present help to me in my time of need” (Psalms 46:1). He answered a cry that was only in my heart and that I had not even expressed with my lips. That was my first experience of a miraculous answer to prayer. God is a Father Who does miracles for His children. The Bible says, “Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart”. I was delighting myself in the Lord alone that day and wanted nothing but Him. The desire of my heart was that I should be kept from seeing that movie. And God granted it. But after I came back to my room, the Lord told me that He would not do that for me a second time. Next time, He wanted me to say “No” to my friends myself - for only thus could I grow strong in His grace. If God did a miracle like that for me every time, I would never become bold or spiritually strong. The next time my friends invited me to the movies I told them boldly that I was now a Christian and would not go with them to the movies any more.

I understood then why God does not grant many of our prayer-requests - because they are actually asking God to do miracles that will make life easy for us. But if God granted all those requests, we would become fat and lazy Christians and not strong, vigorous and bold as He wants us to be. God will encourage us by giving us miraculous answers to prayer occasionally. But many a time, He does not grant our request, lest we remain weak and cowardly. Understanding this truth has solved many mysteries about prayer for me. In these past 46 years, God has answered ALL my prayers – yes, 100% of them. Are you surprised to hear that? Let me explain. Like the three colours in traffic lights, God’s answer to me has, at times been “Yes” (Green), sometimes “Wait” (Orange) and at times “No” (Red). But He has answered every prayer.

There is great safety in obeying the traffic lights. I have found great safety in accepting God’s answers as well – whatever they be.

05.04. CHAPTER 04 Step-By-Step Obedience

CHAPTER 4 Step-By-Step Obedience

I have discovered through the years that God leads us one step at a time. His promise is: “As you go, step by step I will open up the way before you” (Proverbs 4:12 - Literal translation). The pillar of cloud led the Israelites day by day. So does the Holy Spirit lead us today.

Soon after I received the assurance of salvation, I was told that the next step for me was to be baptized in water. I had been christened as a baby in the Syrian Orthodox church - a ceremony that they called “baptism”. And I knew that there were born-again Christians on both sides of this theological fence – those who were “baptized” only as babies like me and those who were baptized as believers. I decided therefore to study the Word of God on this subject to see what it said. As I studied the Word, I discovered a number of truths: First of all, there was not a single mention of child-baptism in the entire New Testament. A few instances of baptism of entire families were there, but there was no mention of whether there were any babies in those families - and we cannot prove any doctrine from the silences of Scripture. John the Baptist baptized only adults. Jesus Himself was baptized only when He was an adult. Jesus baptized adults but only laid hands on (blessed) children. (Many churches however do the exact opposite: they baptize children and lay hands on adults (confirmation)!) When God blotted out my past completely, that included my unscriptural child-baptism as well!!! The first step of obedience that every believer took in Acts of the Apostles was water-baptism.

All this convinced me that I needed to be baptized. But some child-baptized believers told me that there was a far greater need for preaching the gospel in the Orthodox churches than in the believers’ assemblies; and if I got baptized, I would be expelled from the Orthodox church and would then lose opportunities to give the gospel to the unbelievers there. This seemed a very convincing argument - and so I decided not to be baptized.

I remained thus for 18 months. But every time I knelt down to pray, I felt as if God was saying to me: “If you are not listening to Me, why should I listen to you.” And in all those 18 months I made NO spiritual progress at all. This began to disturb me. Finally I told the Lord that I would obey Him, even if I was thrown out of every church in the world. And so in January 1961 I got baptized.

After that, I began to grow in my Christian life by leaps and bounds. I then realized that I could not possibly be a blessing to others, if I was disobedient to God’s commands myself. I decided thereafter that I would obey God’s Word immediately in every matter – big or small – whatever men or churches may say. How much spiritual loss we suffer when we do not listen to the arguments of human reason and disobey God’s Word.

Since that first step of obedience 43 years ago, God has shown me many more steps of obedience. But each time, He showed me the next step, only after I had taken the step He had already shown me. God’s Word is “a lamp to our feet” (Psalms 119:105), meaning that it shows us only the next step for our feet and not the whole road in front of us. This is like holding a torch and

walking along a dark road. We can see only a little bit of the road at a time – just enough for the next step. To see more of the road ahead, we have to move forward.

If I had not taken that first step of obedience, I might never have seen another step in God's will for my life – and I would have wasted my days on earth, even if I did go to heaven. If God has clearly shown you some step of obedience now, obey Him immediately, lest you miss the will of God for your life.

Obedience is a step-by-step matter.

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