

July to September 2010

**“With Christ
On The Mount”**

by
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About the Author



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“WITH CHRIST ON THE MOUNT”

It is a great privilege to spend precious time with our Lord Jesus Christ on the Mount, away from the hustle and bustle of life, in quiet meditation to receive His life transforming words.

The Sermon on the Mount gives us the portrait of true godliness. It teaches us how to be true Christians and how to live with sincerity of heart according to God’s character. Jesus, the Son of God, is the exact representation of the Father. Jesus’ teachings are a true representation of His life. Perfect, sinless, pure! He is the Master Teacher.

There is a holy attractiveness in the Christ-like character that is beyond the grasp of unredeemed, sinful man. It is in the realm of the redeemed man, the spiritual man, that Christ-likeness is a blessed reality. Jesus paints this beautiful portrait of the godly man for our benefit. He contrasts the Christ-like character with the ugliness of the carnal man to help us see the difference.

His command is that the redeemed man makes a wise decision to choose godliness and to forsake a profane lifestyle. Godliness cannot be faked but is seen in how man approaches God and his fellowmen.

May the Lord help us to learn well the lesson of true godliness, to be salt and light in a dying and sin-darkened, materialistic and pleasure-seeking world. Godliness is the best capital for evangelism. Our changed lives speak best the transforming power of the gospel.

The teachings of our Lord Jesus, preserved perfectly in its entirety, are made available to us afresh. The same words that have inflamed the hearts of countless multitudes over the centuries continue to be effectual and effective for our generation. The preaching and teaching of God’s Word is God’s appointed means for each generation of Christians in extending His mercy to the lost in their generation. It is no exception for us. Our Lord Jesus sets for us the example. He has also sent us to make disciples of all nations. This is the urgency of the task in these last of the last days to prepare for His coming Kingdom!

THE SETTING

Matthew 5:1-2: *“And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying...”*

Jesus began His public teaching ministry when He addressed the multitudes upon a mount. This address, commonly known as “The Sermon on the Mount,” is recorded in Matthew 5 to 7, consisting of 107 verses. The multitudes that followed Jesus came from as far as Syria and beyond Jordan, and as near as the vicinity of Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem and Judaea (Matt 4:23-25).

Why did Matthew record that Jesus *“opened his mouth”*? I believe it is to emphasize the importance of Jesus’ speech and to mark the sacredness of the words that will proceed out of His mouth. God is speaking (Jn 1:18, 10:30, 14:9)! And behold what tremendous blessings are proceeding! This is the longest recorded speech of our Lord in His entire earthly ministry.

Contrast this with the close of our Lord’s earthly ministry when He remained silent amidst betrayal and tremendous persecution, *“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth”* (Isa 53:7 cf. Matt 26:63; 27:12-14). It is as if to say: “Whatever you need to know with regard to matters of your eternal blessings, I have already given you! Will you not receive it for your blessing?” We can observe here the hardness of the unregenerate human heart! Our Lord had to go the way of the cross (to suffer and to die) in order to seal the promises of His words that whosoever will come may inherit the Kingdom of God.

THOUGHT: *“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”* (1 Cor 15:22)

PRAYER: “Have mercy, I implore Thee; Redeemer, spurn me not!”

FRIDAY, JULY 2

MATTHEW 5:1-2

MATTHEW 4:23-25

*“The people which sat in darkness saw great light;
and to them which sat in the...
shadow of death light is sprung up.”*

THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

The search for inner calm and peace in the heart has been the struggle for mankind throughout the ages. Jesus was sent by the Father for this purpose. He expressed His love for the people by reaching out to the multitudes, healing them of their physical infirmities. It reveals Jesus' deity that He is indeed God. The miracles aroused the people and prepared them to receive the message of the kingdom for there was soon a gathering of disciples that followed Him from place to place. Never before in man's recorded history has there been such an abundance of miracles. Jesus has power to give organic healing of diseases. He has power over the demonic world to heal demonic possession. He has power over the deranged mind to heal mental illnesses. Yet the better news He offers them is the healing of their souls which have been plagued by this incurable disease called sin.

There was a morning when I stood on a chair trying to find something from a tall cupboard when suddenly a picture frame hanging on the wall crashed to the floor, shattering the glass. Pieces of shattered glass were all over the floor. I took a vacuum cleaner to try to clean up the tiny pieces of shattered glass and was inadvertently cut by some tiny stray pieces. There was no way to restore the broken picture frame. But not with God! No matter how broken we think our life is, He has the power to make it beautiful again. Jesus is offering an opportunity for every broken heart to be restored anew.

Christianity is a relationship between man and God. Sin results in a broken relationship. However, Jesus the Great Physician can mend this broken relationship. This is the 'good news' or 'gospel' of the kingdom. Jesus brings peace to all who will receive Him and His message. Jesus says to you, *“Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”* (Matt 4:17).

THOUGHT: “There are two things to do about the gospel – believe it and behave it.” (Susanna Wesley 1669-1742)

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for sending Thy Son to give me life eternal.

SATURDAY, JULY 3

MATTHEW 5:3-12

ROMANS 5:1-11

*“The Christian belongs to God’s kingdom,
having a heavenly citizenship.”*

THE GODLY MAN’S BLESSINGS

Jesus begins the godly man’s portrait by pronouncing his blessedness nine times from Matthew 5:3-12. *“Blessed”* or *“makarioi”* is an adjective in the plural describing multiples of happiness bestowed upon such a man. It is bestowed by God. This man is justified by faith, spiritually alive, born-again. His happiness is characterized by peace, hope and joy in the heart given by the Holy Spirit who indwells him (Rom 5:1, 4, 11).

“Blessed” is the first word that our Lord Jesus say in the Sermon on the Mount. *“Curse”* is the last word of the Old Testament. Jesus came to show His listeners the way of blessing, of true happiness, when He uttered these gracious words of blessings which show the Christian steps to a blessed life. How does a man possess this spiritual happiness? It can be acquired and built into his character by following Jesus’ instructions.

The godly man is characterized by a poverty of spirit (v 3), a mourner’s heart (v 4), meekness (v 5), an unquenchable thirst and hunger for learning and doing according to God’s word (v 6), mercy (v 7), and purity of heart (v 8). He is also a peacemaker (v 9) and suffers persecution for preaching the gospel (v 10-12).

When Luther died, he left behind no estate. As he sets forth his will, he had “no ready money, no treasure of coin of any description.” But his life, changed by the deep study of God’s Word, was the blessed picture of a godly man. He was vastly more honoured and followed than all the princes of Germany! His 95 statements sparked off the Protestant Reformation. His translation of the Bible into German showed the way to spiritual freedom and happiness to his people who had lived in spiritual darkness and misery for a thousand years. This revival spread all over Europe and the gospel light began to shine again.

THOUGHT: “All Christians are to be like this by the grace of God.”

PRAYER: Help me to lay a good foundation for godly character.

THE POOR IN SPIRIT

Jesus' incarnation and life represent the highest point in man's history. Jesus was sent by the Father at the lowest point in the spiritual state of His chosen witness, Israel. They had the laws of Moses but had not understood them. Jesus called these unconverted Pharisees and Scribes blind leaders of the blind (Matt 15:14). Jesus, the Giver of the law to Moses more than 1500 years ago, condescended Himself and took on human flesh, in order to interpret to them the law!

The first lesson in Jesus' school of theology is to acknowledge our spiritual bankruptcy! We cannot approach God except by humbling ourselves before God to acknowledge our total depravity! This is the meaning of being *"poor in spirit."* It is the first step towards receiving God's favour. Listen carefully to our Saviour's words and pray that we may understand this first law of His kingdom! Only Jesus has the power to break the hold of pride and self in our lives. May we plead with Him to humble us that we may be truly blessed of Him! I realized this truth in the second year of university, and this was the beginning of salvation for me. Proverbs 3:5-6 spoke to my heart, *"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."*

The battle within the heart is so intense and so real for our natural self to resist the denying of self! We are a self-righteous people. In driving, the term used is: our "blind spot." We can see the faults of others but we cannot see our own depravity. God has to deliberately confront us to help us see our depravity. "Poverty of spirit" is therefore a condition of the heart which has been touched by the Holy Spirit to know the truth!

THOUGHT: "There is more hope for a self-convicted sinner than there is for a self-conceited saint."

PRAYER: Bring my weary and troubled soul to the cross where my Saviour bled and died for me and restore me to Thee.

MONDAY, JULY 5

MATTHEW 5:3b

LUKE 17:20-21

“The Kingdom of God exists because God reigns.

*Our part is to enter this kingdom and
bring our life under His sovereign will.”*

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN (1)

Matthew 5:3: *“Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

The kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God is the abode of *“the poor in spirit.”* Heaven is the realm of God, the abode of God. *“Theirs”* simply means *“belonging to them.”* This is the glad tidings that Jesus is proclaiming. The humble in heart has his permanent residence with God. This is the pre-requisite or heart condition needed for entrance to this blessed residence. The ruler of the kingdom is God Himself, visibly represented by His Son Jesus Christ, the King (Matt 27:11, Mark 15:2, Luke 23:3, Rev 17:14; 19:16)! The subjects of the kingdom are characterized by being *“poor in spirit.”* These are the ones who will humble themselves to receive Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

Jesus says *“the kingdom of God is within you”* (Luke 17:21) for God rules in the heart of every born again believer who acknowledges His headship or kingship. Yet, the kingdom of God is termed as a heavenly kingdom to emphasize the universal, unseen and sovereign reign of God over all His creation.

Jesus testifies to Pilate that the purpose of His first coming is not to set up an earthly kingdom but to make a way for man to enter the heavenly kingdom. *“... My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence”* (John 18:36). Pilate further enquires if Jesus is therefore King. To that Jesus testifies, *“Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice”* (John 18:37).

THOUGHT: “Wherever God rules over the human heart as King, there is the kingdom of God established.”

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to align my life with Thy will this day.

TUESDAY, JULY 6

MATTHEW 5:3b

LUKE 23:43

*“By heaven we understand a state
of happiness infinite in degree
and endless in duration.”*

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN (2)

Jesus came from heaven to give a place in heaven to all who will receive Him (John 3:15). Jesus proclaims that the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Matt 4:17). He is pointing His listeners to the cross where He will die and shed His blood for the remission of their sins. All who acknowledge their hopeless and lost estate will be saved. All who humble themselves to receive Him will be blessed. This was the privilege of the repentant thief who acknowledged his utter hopelessness. And Jesus pronounced upon him this blessing, *“Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.”*

There was a man who had a skin growth on the right side of his face. His face bulged out. His days were numbered with perhaps 1 to 3 months left to live. The Christian doctor who treated him gave him a tract. He called back a week later showing interest to find peace for his heart and a solution to his imminent death. His throat was fast closing up and he was advised to put a tube into his throat to allow him to receive fluid into his body. This Christian doctor called to ask me for support to share the gospel. I was thankful to the Lord for being able to share the gospel with a booklet tract. He was deeply aware of his utterly helpless estate and the Holy Spirit opened his heart. He asked, “Can I keep the booklet?” We said, “Certainly, here is also a copy of the Bible for you, read it!” He received the Lord with joy and gladness. He received the blessing of salvation by faith in the finished work of Christ. The Christian doctor prayed for him committing him to the Lord. Praise the Lord! Just a week earlier, this same booklet tract was used to share the gospel with another man who became angry. What a contrast!

THOUGHT: “The world has many religions, but it has but one gospel.”

PRAYER: Lord, let my heart be right with Thee and let me experience the burden for lost souls!

WEDNESDAY, JULY 7

MATTHEW 5:4

NEHEMIAH 8:4-10

“Sorrow is the root of all virtue.”

BLESSINGS OF MOURNERS

Matthew 5:4: *“Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.”*

Israel was re-established in their homeland after 70 years of exile in Babylon. Those were years of soul searching and reflection in an idolatrous land. The people gathered together to hear the preaching and teaching of God’s Word. The people mourned and wept as they heard the words of the law. The people grieved and sorrowed for their sins as they reflected on the disparity in their own lives in the light of the clear teaching of God’s Word which was expounded to them. It convicted their hearts and caused them to be drawn closer to God to rebuild their spiritual lives. It resulted in true revival! The law of God was given to Israel so that they may know how to live as witnesses to the living and true God. It was for their blessings.

*Command Thy blessing, Jesus, Lord!
May we Thy true disciples be;
Speak to each heart the mighty word,
Say to the weakest, follow Me.*

Spurgeon observes well, “In godly sorrow, a man’s heart empties itself before God, and then Christ empties His heart out to supply the needs of His poor sorrowing child. In confessing to Christ our deficiencies, He reveals to us His fullness. When we tell Jesus our sorrows, He tells us His joys. We tell Him our sins, He tells us His righteousness.” Mourners are promised the blessing of God’s comfort! Indeed they shall be comforted.

THOUGHT: “God does not comfort us to make us comfortable, but to make us comforters.” (John Henry Jowett, 1817-1893)

PRAYER: Help me to see my sins and repent of them!

THURSDAY, JULY 8

MATTHEW 5:5

PSALM 37:7-11; LUKE 22:41-44

*“The LORD lifteth up the meek: he casteth
the wicked down to the ground.”*

BLESSED ARE THE MEEK

Matthew 5:5: *“Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.”*

The word “*meek*” describes “an attitude of quiet, reverent and humble submission to the will and purpose of God.” The quality of “meekness” is a gentle, quiet spirit of selfless devotion to God. It is an enduring and obedient spirit that is contented with one’s lot in life as God has given. Such a one, Christ pronounces blessed. The opposite of meekness is self-will, a rebellious and complaining spirit.

The “*meek*” is described as one who quietly waits upon the LORD in times of hardship and adversity (Ps 37:9), frets not and envies not the wicked in his prosperity. He seeks to live his life God’s way, not acting rashly but according to God’s Word. The psalmist declares, *“the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace”* (Ps 37:11). God’s peace abides and abounds in him. God promises to take care of his needs. He will have a place of refuge always on this earth. In the days of famine, he shall be satisfied. He will always have a place of service for his Lord while he lives and will reign physically on earth with Christ in the Millennium to come.

Our Lord Jesus sets for us the example of a meek and humble spirit by His consecration and His holy resolve to fulfill His Father’s will always. At the Garden of Gethsemane, He agonized in prayer that the Father would grant Him strength to endure the sufferings and humiliation of the cross to purchase our redemption. The angel appeared unto Him from heaven and strengthened Him. What an encouragement for every suffering saint. Our Lord knows. He understands when we cry to Him when it seems so difficult to walk according to Scriptures. Jesus suffered, and even died, but He rose victorious over death on the third day giving to us everlasting life and hope!

THOUGHT: Though He slays me yet will I trust Him.

PRAYER: Grant me, Lord, a heart of submission to do Thy will.

FRIDAY, JULY 9

MATTHEW 5:6

PROVERBS 2:1-9

“A man is an empty man when his heart is not full of Christ.”

HUNGER AND THIRST AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS

The spiritual man will have a hunger and thirst after spiritual things. Prayer is as breathing and the study of God’s Word is as eating. The awakened soul seeks after God. The promise of blessing for every seeking heart is that it shall be satisfied and be filled with the goodness of God’s abundant blessings. The spiritual man seeks after God. To him, these are the things that count and last for eternity. What we do now has repercussions and implications that last for eternity for ourselves and our loved ones! God has made us eternal beings! The decisions and the paths we take in this life have eternal consequences. We are faced with choices daily! To choose to go here or to go there, this way or that way? How do we know what is the right choice? How can we walk in the path of God’s blessing?

When we diligently study the Word of God (Prov 2:1-2), personalizing the lessons with much prayer (Prov 2:3) and patience as seeking for treasure (Prov 2:4), it will build in us a spirit of self-control, a restraining spirit, a resolute spirit to do what is right in the sight of God. It internalizes for us the reason for what we should do, so that it becomes a part of our way of life, a godly habit and a godly heritage we pass to our children. Indeed, the Lord will feed us with His wisdom and blessing. The landmines in life’s pathway that threaten to ruin our faith are made known in Scripture. We are able to save our souls from these pitfalls. God’s Word is indeed a lamp to our feet and a light to our paths. If we diligently search the Scriptures, we will understand *“the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God”* (Prov 2:5), and understand righteousness and every good path (Prov 2:9). The fear of God is to depart from sin and the knowledge of God will lead us on the path of holiness. A godly life of holiness does not come without a disciplined study of God’s Word and prayer.

THOUGHT: *“Exercise thyself unto godliness”* (1Tim 4:7).

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to be focused in the study of Thy Word and in prayer to build up my spiritual life.

SATURDAY, JULY 10

MATTHEW 5:7

GALATIANS 6:10

*“Mercy is not for them that sin and fear not
but for them that fear and sin not.”*

BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL

Matthew 5:7: *“Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.”*

The merciful are compassionate, benevolently merciful involving thought and action. It refers not merely to those who express acts of mercy but to those who have this attribute as a result of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. And those who obtain mercy are those who are freed from deserved punishment. It is the outworking of God’s love in one’s heart.

Very often, we fail to show mercy to others because of the wickedness they have done and therefore we feel they do not deserve mercy. That may be so! Yet, this character trait of Christian benevolence sees beyond the man and his sins. It is designed to touch the heart by withholding deserved punishment in order to jolt the recipient to repentance. Our Lord Jesus’ dealing with us is the supreme example. We were condemned to eternal destruction in hell fire but God in His mercy sent Jesus to make a way for us! Only the redeemed soul will experience such love and exhibit it. Jesus pronounced such a one as blessed.

The late Rev Dr Timothy Tow taught his students this chorus by Jonathan Goforth, the missionary to China, so that we may be practitioners of this Christian trait of showing mercy to others by giving them the gospel.

*Lord Crucified, give me a heart like Thine
Teach me to love the dying souls of men;
And keep my heart in closest touch with Thee,
And give me love, pure Calvary love,
To bring the lost to Thee.*

THOUGHT: “Bread for myself is a material question, bread for my neighbour is a spiritual.”

PRAYER: Grant me, Lord, a heart of submission to do Thy will.

FOR THEY SHALL OBTAIN MERCY

God's blessings are upon the merciful who lend a helping hand to the poor. This is seen in Psalm 41:1-3.

- (1) The Lord will deliver him in times of trouble (v 1b).
- (2) The Lord will preserve him (v 2a).
- (3) The Lord will keep him (v 2b).
- (4) The Lord shall bless him upon the earth (v 2c).
- (5) The Lord will not deliver him over to the will of his enemies (v 2d).
- (6) The Lord will strengthen and comfort him upon his sick bed (v 3).

A Chinese proverb observes, "He suffers most who is most selfish." The fruit of our selfishness is withholding dues. If we care only to please ourselves, we are building upon a shaky foundation. If we build for the love of God, we are building on a solid foundation. We must examine also our motives for rendering help to others. Is it for a selfish desire of self-preservation that we render help to the helpless? God forbid!

Our good works must come from a heart of gratitude. We must be grateful for that ability and power that lay in our hands to distribute to the necessity of the saints. The power was first given to us by God. As good stewards of the manifold blessings received from the hand of God, we give. The Apostle Paul taught the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:35, "*I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.*" Surely, this is an application of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:7.

THOUGHT: "The best portions of a good man's life – His little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and love."

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to be sensitive to the needs of people around me.

MONDAY, JULY 12

MATTHEW 5:8

ROMANS 7:14-25

*“Holiness is not inability to sin,
but ability not to sin.”*

THE PURE IN HEART (1)

Augustine of Hippo aptly summarized from Scriptures the state of man in relation to sin:

- (1) Pre-fall Adam was able not to sin.
- (2) Post-fall mankind is unable not to sin.
- (3) Christians with their old/new natures are able to sin and not to sin.
- (4) Christ the God-Man (and dead or glorified saints) was and is not able to sin.

Every born-again Christian has been freed from the bondage of sin and is therefore able to choose not to sin. However, the carnal nature which still exists can tempt and cause him to yield to sin. But the born-again Christian has the ability to choose not to sin and to live a holy life. Such are the pure in heart. And it should permeate every area of our lives! The Christian who agonizes against sin is a healthy Christian. Sin does get the better of us, but it should be lesser and lesser. When we are sorely tempted, emotionally very weak, depressed and discouraged, we can fall by doubting God’s ability to care for us! When we realize our sin, we should immediately repent, for if we confess our sins, Jesus is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). The mark of a true Christian is the sense of remorse for his sins and a strong desire to put away sin, to make right with God.

Our Lord Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper for us to periodically examine ourselves. When we have fallen, we must confess, ask the Lord for forgiveness and resolve to come back to Him. When we take the Lord’s Supper in faith with self-examination and confession, there is a special spiritual blessing. He gives to us renewed joy and peace in the heart, having made right with Him. It is as if we start on a clean sheet again.

THOUGHT: “Holiness is not freedom from temptation, but power to overcome temptation.” (G. Campbell Morgan, 1863-1945)

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be holy.

TUESDAY, JULY 13

MATTHEW 5:8

PSALM 24:3-5, 1 TIMOTHY 1:5

“The holy man is not one who cannot sin.

A holy man is one who will not sin.”

THE PURE IN HEART (2)

Matthew 5:8: *“Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.”*

The psalmist highlighted that the pure in heart is described as one who has *“not lifted up his soul unto vanity nor sworn deceitfully.”* This is the litmus test of purity. We are to examine our hearts and our conversations if they have been frivolous in the sight of God. This is a simple test. Does our conscience convict us? Have we lied and done things that are dishonest? If so, may we repent!

God is infinite, eternal and unchangeable in His holiness. In Him is no sin! Unless we come to Jesus for cleansing, we shall not see God. Our sins drive us away from the thrice holy God. Fanny Crosby understood this truth as revealed in her hymn *“Near the Cross.”*

*Near the cross, a trembling soul,
Love and mercy found me;
There the Bright and Morning Star
Sheds its beams around me.*

*In the cross, in the cross,
Be my vision glorious;
All my sins are washed away
In the blood of Jesus.*

The righteous shall experience the blessed hand of God leading and guiding their lives moment by moment. The Lord showing evident tokens of His very presence in our lives is the meaning of the statement, *“the pure in heart shall see God.”* And there is an ultimate glory coming when believers experience the rapture at the second coming of Christ. Only those who have all their sins washed by the blood of Jesus shall see Him face to face at His second coming.

THOUGHT: *“The true Christian is not to be happy but to be holy.”*

PRAYER: Give me Thy grace, Lord, that I might be holy this day.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 14

MATTHEW 5:9

ROMANS 8:13-16

*“Man finds true peace only
by faith through Christ Jesus.”*

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS (1)

The “*peacemakers*” are those who by their deliberate action promote peace to those whom they reach out to. They are ambassadors of God’s peace. This world is struggling to find that elusive peace within the human heart that the peacemaker seeks to enlighten by his testimony. All practising Christians shall be called “*sons of God*” because they are appointed of God and their sonship is evidenced by the self-authenticating witness of the indwelling Holy Spirit (Rom 8:14).

Jesus is their forerunner, being called the Son of God (Matt 4:3) because He has the same characteristic and nature of God. Jesus is conceived of the Holy Spirit, virgin born (Matt 1:18, 20). Born-again Christians are called “*sons of God*” by the Spirit of adoption (Rom 8:15-16). They are able to exhibit in a limited way the communicable attributes of God with the help of the Holy Spirit which puts to death the deeds of the flesh (Rom 8:13).

There was a man who was in the last stage of cancer at the age of 79. He had not confessed Christ Jesus although he was associated to the church by his believing wife and daughter for more than 20 years. In the last four weeks of his life, he was awakened to his spiritual need by the witnesses of several “*peacemakers*” sent to minister the truth to him by the friends of both his wife and daughter. His desire to be baptized after he confessed Christ was so strong. God granted him his desire of public confession. When he made peace with God by accepting Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour, he told his family, “I am so happy.” The peace of God resided with him (Rom 5:1, 11) to the delight of his wife and daughter who knew by faith that they would see him in heaven.

THOUGHT: “*Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not*” (1 John 3:1).

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be Thy worthy ambassador!

THURSDAY, JULY 15

MATTHEW 5:9

MATTHEW 10:12-15

*“Let the peace of God
rule in your hearts...”*

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS (2)

William Carey (1761-1854) is called the Father of Modern Missions for his contribution as a “*peacemaker*” to bring the gospel to India for 40 years. He was founder of Serampore College, the first Christian college in Asia. He was instrumental also in the translation of the first Bengali New Testament. This phrase “Expect great things from God. Attempt Great things for God” came from his most influential sermon from the text Isaiah 54:2-3, “*Enlarge the place of thy tent...*”

Dr George Smith testified, “The last days of William Carey were his best. His sun went down in all the splendour of a glowing faith and a burning self-sacrifice. Not in the poverty of Hackleton and Moulton, not in the hardships of Calcutta and the Sundarbans, not even in the fevers of the Dinajpur swamps...had the father of modern missions been so tried as in the years 1830 to 1833. Blow succeeded blow, but only that the fine gold of his trust, his humility, and his love might be seen to be the purer.”

He suffered most in his pioneering days but he never looked back! He was a true disciple of Jesus. He learned how to handle rejection to the gospel of peace he offered with such unconditional love to carry on persevering as Jesus had instructed His disciples in Matthew 10:13-14, “*And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet.*”

The same tract given to two different persons can result in two totally different responses. Will you be discouraged when a person responds in anger to God’s words of peace? Jesus encouraged His disciples to press on with the work! Will you not?

THOUGHT: “*Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not*” (1 John 3:1).

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be Thy worthy ambassador!

FRIDAY, JULY 16

MATTHEW 5:10

JOHN 15:18-21

*“Marvel not, my brethren,
if the world hate you.”*

PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS’ SAKE (1)

Matthew 5:10: *“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

To be “*persecuted for righteousness’ sake*” is to be persecuted for standing firm in obedience to God’s Word. There was a brother-in-Christ whose work required him to submit bids to secure projects for his company. One day, the boss of his company gave him a photostated copy of his competitor’s bid and asked him to use it to secure the tender. He would just have to bid slightly higher than his competitor’s bid and he would have won the project. But he did not! He had to resign from his company for his own testimony’s sake.

When I visited this brother at home, he related to me how the Lord encouraged him when he was feeling very depressed because he was jobless. He said he was in the room alone and he knew that his mind was clear but his emotion was weighing him down. He was going into depression. Suddenly, his young son marched into the room and sung the song he had learned in Sunday School, “My God is so big, so strong and so mighty, there’s nothing my God cannot do!” It woke him out of his depression. As he related the incident to me, he praised God for manifesting Himself to him in his moment of deepest distress as a result of standing firm for Christ!

Our Lord Jesus gave this sobering truth to His disciples in John 15:19b-21, “... *I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name’s sake, because they know not him that sent me.*”

THOUGHT: “It is preferable to have the whole world against thee, than Jesus offended with thee.” (Thomas Kempis, 1380-1471)

PRAYER: Give me strength, Lord, to obey Thee rather than man.

SATURDAY, JULY 17

MATTHEW 5:11-12

HEBREWS 13:6

*“Joy is the most infallible sign
of the presence of God.”*

PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS’ SAKE (2)

Matthew 5:11-12: *“Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”*

D. L. Moody saw that the blessedness of trials was a heart of rejoicing when he observed, “Happiness is caused by things that happen around me, and circumstances will mar it; but joy flows right on through trouble; joy flows on through the dark; joy flows on through persecution and opposition. It is an unceasing fountain bubbling up in the heart; a secret spring the world can’t see and doesn’t know anything about. The Lord gives his people perpetual joy when they walk in obedience to him.” This is the comfort of every persecuted saint. The Lord is with you, press on!

Jesus endured suffering by accepting His Father’s will for Him to be betrayed by Judas Iscariot, hated by Caiaphas the high priest and sent to die by crucifixion. He knew that it was through no fault of His own. It was a total surrender and a quiet submission to the will of God, as the prophet Isaiah recorded, *“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth”* (Isa 53:7).

This quiet confidence of the believer in the midst of persecution is the strength of a trusting heart. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews concludes with this promise, *“So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me”* (Heb 13:6).

THOUGHT: “Wherever you see persecution, there is more than a probability that truth is on the persecuted side.” (Hugh Latimer, 1485-1855)

PRAYER: Give me strength, Lord, to obey Thee rather than man.

YE ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH

Matthew 5:13: *"Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men."*

"Salt has value but is inexpensive. Its properties far exceed its value. Salt is used for seasoning, preserving and purifying." This is observed by a missionary when he shared from this verse with a group of senior citizens in one of his visits to Singapore. He encouraged each one never to retire from being the salt of the earth even at an old age.

This verse makes the stark comparison between salt that has lost its saltiness and the Christian who has lost his vitality as a witness for his Lord. This can happen in old age from discouragements as a result of sicknesses. One elderly Christian had to be rushed to the hospital emergency ward four times in one year due to various ailments. Brothers and sisters in Christ visited her to encourage her to continue to trust God. She did! All praise and glory to our Lord. For younger believers to see the demonstration of consistent faith amidst trials was a great boost to their spiritual walk.

Salt as a seasoning enhances the taste when added appropriately in cooking (Job 6:6, Isa 30:24). Salt is used as a preservative to retard decomposition (Lev 2:13, Ezek 43:24). It is used figuratively as an emblem of loyalty and perpetuity in the relationship between God and His people. It is called the covenant of salt (Num 18:19; 2 Chron 13:5). Salt has a purifying or medicinal effect when newborn babies are bathed in it and rubbed with it (Ezek 16:4).

The Christian can in many ways be a worthy witness for his Lord (as the multi-function of salt) in the ministry of encouragement, as a living testimony of the gospel and in the defense of the faith.

THOUGHT: Jesus was a friend to publicans and sinners.

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to be more like my Saviour.

MONDAY, JULY 19

MATTHEW 5:14-16

1 THESSALONIANS 1:7-9

“A candle loses nothing by lighting another candle.”

YE ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Matthew 5:14-16: *“Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”*

Light is the greatest metaphor for God. Light is an even more essential element of life in the home than salt. We saw that salt has to keep its saltiness to maintain its usefulness. Light, for it to be useful, must be seen. *“Light”* shines forth the true knowledge and purity of God. It is aptly used to describe the life and witness of the Christian. All that is described in the preceding verses with regard to the Christian character is employed towards keeping this light shining. It is likened to a city that is set on a hill which can be seen even from a far distance. It is the spirit-filled Christian testimony characterized by good works that brings glory to God.

God was not aloft in heaven, not caring for the plight of dying men. He sent His only begotten Son Jesus to dwell among man (John 1:14). The Just for the unjust, the Pure for the impure. Jesus did not despise the publicans and the sinners. His mission was to reach out to save them. We must also learn from the example of our Lord, especially when we are well, to look to the needs of others. This is how we can shine as light to share this *“Light”* with others by our time, our resources and most importantly our prayers. We cannot exist as secret Christians.

The Apostle Paul set this example by his witness throughout the Roman Empire. The church in Thessalonica was one such beacon of light. The Christians in Thessalonica were commended for their exemplary conduct by believers in Macedonia and Achaia. Wherever they went, they functioned as shining lights for their Lord.

THOUGHT: The light within me cannot but shine forth for my Lord.

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to cultivate the light within me.

TUESDAY, JULY 20

MATTHEW 5:17

LUKE 24:44-53

“The Bible stands!”

NOT TO DESTROY BUT TO FULFIL

Matthew 5:17: *“Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.”*

“Think not” expresses a negative command or prohibition. It is a serious warning or exhortation by our Lord Jesus to the multitude against even beginning to think, suppose, believe or consider that He came to dismantle the entire system of God’s Word given to Moses and the prophets. He did not come to demolish but to fulfill all that is written in the Hebrew Old Testament concerning Israel’s Messiah!

Luke 24:44 looks from hindsight what our Lord declares in Matthew 5:17. Jesus affirmed this truth after His resurrection and before His ascension to heaven when He said, *“...These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.”* The three categories – the Law of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy), the prophets (Joshua, Judges, 1&2 Samuel, 1&2 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi) and the psalms or writings (Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, 1&2 Chronicles) make up the Hebrew Old Testament. The theme of the Old Testament was Jesus, Israel’s Messiah.

Jesus opened their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures, *“...And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem...and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them...while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him...with great joy...praising and blessing God. Amen”* (Luke 24:45-53).

THOUGHT: Jesus is indeed the Christ, the Anointed Saviour!

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for revealing Jesus to me!

WEDNESDAY, JULY 21

MATTHEW 5:18

MATTHEW 24:35, ISAIAH 42:8

*“I am the LORD: that is my name:
and my glory will I
not give to another.”*

ALL BE FULFILLED (1)

Matthew 5:18: *“For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.”*

The promises of God are yea and amen! Jesus said that He came to fulfill and not to abrogate/demolish/dismantle the body of God’s written revelation. The adjective that qualifies the way in which God’s law will be fulfilled is *“all.”* It will be a perfect fulfillment. Jesus emphasized the exactness in which God’s Word will be fulfilled. It will be to the minutest detail. As long as heaven and earth exist, neither one jot or *iota* (the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet) nor one tittle or *projection/hook/stroke* (the smallest part of the letter of the Hebrew alphabet) will ever be lost, till all are fulfilled. The negation *“shall in no wise”* is the strongest possible expression of negation in the Greek language. It denies any potentiality, ruling out even the idea of a possibility. It is the strongest way to make a negative statement of a future occurrence.

What great assurance our Lord is giving us! He emphatically reaffirmed the fulfillment of all promises in Holy Scriptures when He said, *“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away”* (Matt 24:35; Mark 13:31, Luke 21:33). Our perfect God according to His perfect Word showed that His people receiving His perfect Son may have perfect peace. Our late principal Rev Timothy Tow was challenged with the statement *“there are mistakes in God’s Word, but these don’t affect doctrine, so they are alright.”* He responded with these grave and insightful words of blessing and cursing, *“If you always render absolute glory to God Almighty and not speak of yourself for your own glory and believe in a 100% Perfect Bible, you will have a blessed and not an accursed ministry.”*

THOUGHT: Our Perfect God who inspired His Perfect words and also preserved them, necessitates a Perfect Bible in our hands today!

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, not to doubt but to affirm all Thy words!

THURSDAY, JULY 22

MATTHEW 5:18

PSALM 12:6-7

*“The words of the LORD are pure words ...
Thou shalt keep them, O LORD,
thou shalt preserve them ... for ever.”*

ALL BE FULFILLED (2)

We are not to be involved in the business of doubting but in affirming God’s words. This is crucial because doctrines come from words. A missing word or a missing letter changes the meaning of a doctrine totally. God does not leave us in doubt. Where, you may ask, is God’s Word today?

This is the 25th November 2005 statement by the Trinitarian Bible Society giving the source of the Perfect Bible, “The Masoretic Hebrew and the Greek Received Texts that the Constitution of the Trinitarian Bible Society acknowledges to have been preserved by the special providence of God within Judaism and Christianity. Therefore these texts are definitive and the final point of reference in all the Society’s work. The Society accepts as the best edition of the Hebrew Masoretic text the one prepared in 1524-25 by Jacob ben Chayyim and known, after David Bomberg the publisher, as the Bomberg text. This text underlies the Old Testament in the Authorized Version. The Greek Received Text is the name given to a group of printed texts, the first of which was published by Desiderius Erasmus in 1516. The Society uses for the purposes of translation the text reconstructed by F.H.A. Scrivener in 1894.”

Holding to the view of the Masoretic Text/Textus Receptus’ perfection protects us from the onslaught of Satan and his forces in undermining God’s Word. It silences every textual critic. No job for them, because we have all the words of Scripture already. We have no need to doubt but press on with the work of evangelism with a Perfect Bible in our hands. This is not foolish faith but a most God honouring faith.

THOUGHT: Not the carelessness of copyist but their carefulness!

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for confirming to me all Thy words.

FRIDAY, JULY 23

MATTHEW 5:19

ACTS 1:1-3, 2 CORINTHIANS 5:9-10

*“A good teacher affects eternity;
he can never tell
where his influence stops.”*

DO AND TEACH

Matthew 5:19: *“Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”*

The necessity to be a genuine practitioner of God’s Word is the warning given by our Lord Jesus in this verse. The church historian Luke affirms this truth by our Lord’s infallible example for He indeed proved His teaching by His deeds. The cart placed before the horse cannot move. Unless we ourselves are convicted of God’s truth, how can we tell others?

Here, our Lord distinguishes two categories of saints in the kingdom of heaven. The first group is called *“least”* and the second is called *“great.”*

The late Rev Dr Timothy Tow made the candid yet solemn observation in his book *“Coming World Events Unveiled”* that those who will be *“great”* in the kingdom *“are rejoicing in the banqueting hall”* while the first group called the *“least”* in the kingdom *“are downgraded as dish washers, and washers of pots and pans.”* Our Lord Jesus’ return draws near and it is nearer than we think. He will come as the final Judge. Hence, the Apostle Paul gave us 2 Corinthians 5:9-10 to prepare our hearts to meet with our Lord, *“Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.”*

THOUGHT: *“A teacher who is attempting to teach without inspiring the pupil with a desire to learn by a good example is hammering on cold iron.”*

PRAYER: Lord, give me Thy grace to live by Thy commandments.

EXCEPT YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS

The scribes and Pharisees “offered sacrifices, fasted often, prayed much, were very punctilious about ablutions and tithes and the ceremonies of religion, but neglected justice, truth, purity, holiness of heart, and did not strive to be pure in their motives before God” (Barnes). True righteousness is not just an external demeanour but one that comes from a truly sanctified heart. Jesus wanted the people to distinguish between genuine righteousness and self-righteousness.

Our Lord Jesus is the exact representation of true righteousness. He came to show us true righteousness! The charge of our Lord is very serious because religious authenticity and authority are vested in the hands of the scribes and Pharisees. It is common knowledge. And He likens the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees to man-made righteousness that does not gain a soul into heaven. These are called the oral traditions. He charges them for having God’s Word but not understanding God’s Word. The Pharisee named Nicodemus came to Jesus by night to be instructed on how to be born-again and to enter the kingdom of heaven. Nicodemus’ conversion brings hope to every self-righteous Pharisee if only he will humble himself to receive the truth.

The Roman Catholic Church forbids the clergy to marry till recently. This is against the clear teaching of Scripture (1 Tim 4:3a) and the Apostle Paul warns of it, calling it “*doctrines of devils*” (1 Tim 4:1). Martin Luther, the Augustinian monk who sparked the 16th Century Protestant Reformation in 1517, was happily married to Katherine von Bora, a nun, in 1525, establishing a covenant home according to Scriptures. They also began family worship and prayers and the catechism of children. The Apostle Paul who did not marry gives this admonition, “*I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn*” (1 Cor 7:8-9).

THOUGHT: God takes notice of clean hands.

PRAYER: Help me discern the truth from Scriptures and live by it.

THOU SHALT NOT KILL

The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees is a self-made righteousness. They declared their own standards of the law. The low view of what constitutes sin as given in the law will be pointed out categorically by our Lord Jesus from Matthew 5:21-48. He will give the true sense of the law pertaining to murder (vv 21-26), adultery (vv 27-30), divorce (vv 31-32), revenge (vv 38-42) and hatred (vv 43-48). Jesus first points out what is wrong with *"it was said"* and then He gives the true sense, *"but I say unto you"* (vv 21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43).

This sixth commandment has been greatly distorted. It is not just the actual act of murder that is forbidden. Unrighteous or sinful anger that causes one to speak unkind words is also considered murder. It transgresses this commandment and is liable for God's judgment. An unmerciful spirit shows a depraved heart, one that is not born-again. *"Raca"* is a term of abuse, a derogatory way of degrading someone by calling him *"an empty-headed fool."*

There was a brother-in-Christ who shared with me that in the past there was that deep hatred in his heart. He easily became very angry because he was easily provoked. Oftentimes, he became violent. He confessed that deep inside, he felt that he was not loved. He did not know how to express his frustration except in violent behaviour. There was not a restraining spirit within him until he understood the true meaning of Jesus' love. Jesus went to the cross to die and shed His precious blood to pay the penalty for his sins. He testified that it took away that hatred in his heart. That was the only way which he obtained peace in his heart. Today, he spends his time repaying his gospel debt by giving out tracts and speaking to anyone who is willing to hear the story of his Great Saviour.

THOUGHT: "Anger may arise in the bosom of a wise man, but it rests only in the bosom of fools."

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for the healing stream at Calvary.

FIRST BE RECONCILED TO THY BROTHER

Jesus is admonishing His listeners that having an unforgiving spirit is equivalent to spiritual murder. An unforgiving spirit literally eats up a person's sense of true peace. Therefore, His advice is to quickly make up by forgiving the other person. Notice the repeated use of the conjunction “and” and the urgent commands “leave,” “go,” “reconciled,” “offer” to emphasize the deliberateness of the action needed to make peace with an offended brother. The Apostle John learns well from our Lord when he wrote, “*He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes*” (1 John 2:9-11).

As parents, this is one important lesson we must teach our children. Brothers and sisters often offend one another. There is that hatred between siblings that can spark from the smallest thing. How they need to make up and realize the hurt they have caused. Also, a husband has to be reconciled with his wife, as sons and daughters with their parents!

*One great truth in life I've found,
While journeying to the West;
The only folks we really wound
Are those we love the best.*

*We flatter those we scarcely know,
We please the fleeting guest,
And deal fully many a thoughtless blow
To those we love the best.*

(Ella Wheeler Wilcox)

THOUGHT: “Faults in others I can see; but praise the Lord, there's none in me.” Let this not be true of me!

PRAYER: Help me make peace with man and find acceptance in Thee.

AGREE WITH THINE ADVERSARY

Matthew 5:25-26: *“Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.”*

Let us examine ourselves to make sure that there is no wrongdoing on our part that we are ashamed of before we accuse another. It is better for us to work towards our personal sanctification before we try to improve others around us. This is an admonition to make peace with our enemy quickly while there is still a possibility of doing so before the situation becomes irreconcilable. This is divine wisdom. This is the scenario of a contesting lawsuit. A Christian writer observes, “It may sometimes be expedient to make peace by sacrificing even your just rights, because these would be dearly purchased by the risk of failure, condemnation and imprisonment ... how much more ought such an issue to be sought when there is nothing to be gained and everything to lose by cherishing the enmity of others ... be well minded or disposed to reconciliation.”

There can be many occasions in life when we come into dispute with others. It is perhaps in home renovations with contractors or purchases made where we refer to the small claims tribunal for judgment. May we take care of our Christian testimony when we go about claiming our rights! Be sure that we are not at fault in the first place. None of us can claim we are without faults. Often in the heat of dispute, we tarnish our Christian testimony. May we humble ourselves and make right where we have been wrong. Even when we have been right, let us be wise to weigh the consequences of having our right of way.

THOUGHT: Think well whether the case be right, or even if it be, whether it is worth the contention.

PRAYER: Help me to be more concerned that I mature in Thy love.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 28

MATTHEW 5:27-28

JOB 31:1; PROVERBS 6:32

*“Man is the only animal
that blushes.” (Mark Twain)*

THOU SHALT NOT COMMIT ADULTERY

Matthew 5:27-28: *“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.”*

Our Lord gives the understanding of the seventh commandment, *“Thou shalt not commit adultery”* when he states that in God’s sight inordinate lust after a woman in the heart, thought and imagination, is committing adultery. This should not startle us. If there is no one that condemns us, our own awakened conscience must condemn us when we sin as such, says our Lord. This is true piety!

It must cause us to realize the exceeding holiness of God and how we fall short of His glory. It is reasonable for God to judge us by our thought life because He is omniscient. He is able to read our thoughts. Such is the holiness God expects of His children whom He has ransomed by His suffering and death. It is the heaviest price paid!

Job made a covenant with God that he would not defile himself by thinking evil thoughts of a maid. He was very serious about living a holy life, in fulfilling God’s standard of holiness as Jesus stipulated to the multitude. Realize that Job is the earliest book of the Bible. That standard has not changed but has been perverted by sinful men. Our study must awaken us to the truth about how God’s laws should be applied in our lives today as it did to the people in Jesus’ time.

When we sin, we are separated from God. We need to be reconciled with God by acknowledging our wrongdoing and asking for forgiveness. This is the first step toward reconciliation. We can then rely on Him to give us strength and power to overcome temptation and weakness. This is the same for every sin that besets us!

THOUGHT: “Sin is not a distance, it is a turning of our heart and gaze in the wrong direction.”

PRAYER: O Lord, keep my eyes and my thoughts centered on Thee.

THURSDAY, JULY 29

MATTHEW 5:29-30

1 CORINTHIANS 6:9-10

“Only when the axe is put to the tree does the fruit of sin wither.”

PLUCK IT OUT AND CAST IT

Matthew 5:29-30: *“And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.”*

There is a preacher of God’s Word who travels from city to city in America. Whenever he checks into a hotel, he will ask the hotel staff to remove the television set. He testifies that he does that so as not to subject himself to the temptation of wanting to switch on the television and be ensnared by the filth. He understands his weakness and takes steps to guard himself from such known temptation by a determined effort.

Our Lord dealt a firm hand against giving any excuse for the sin of adultery by instructing that the instruments of sin be cut off before it is allowed to wreak havoc in our lives. Guard our eye-gate and free-hands. The word “*offend*” literally means “to cause one to fall or sin.” These temptations will come repeatedly and continually to ensnare us. Jesus uses vivid word pictures by three commands: “*pluck out*,” “*cut off*” and “*cast off*,” emphasizing the action to put away and destroy the instruments that will cause us to sin! Sexual sins plague both old and young. Whether it is pornography, the increasing number of pubs, the new Integrated Resorts or the unrestrained access of the Internet, the ultimate victim is the sinner himself. We have a choice to protect ourselves. The Apostle Paul learns well from our Lord when he warns us, “*Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: ... nor adulterers ... shall inherit the kingdom of God*” (1 Cor 6:9-10).

THOUGHT: “Sin is not wrong doing; it is wrong being, deliberate and emphatic independence from God.” (Oswald Chambers)

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to guard my heart and my eyes this day.

FRIDAY, JULY 30

MATTHEW 5:31-32

MATTHEW 19:7-9

“Rejoice with the wife of thy youth.”

A WRITING OF DIVORCEMENT

Matthew 5:31-32: *“It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.”*

Even Christian couples are seeking to terminate their marriage covenants by seeking legal separation and eventually divorce. Some already have children, adding to the tragedy. Often, the reason is that the husband and wife are not communicating and have been living separate lives under one roof for many years. Often it is the wife who has lost the experience of the husband’s love for her. There are also instances of wives being so caught up with their careers that there is no nurturing environment in the home for the children, much to the frustration of the husband. There seems to be lacking a persevering spirit of trusting the Lord and living by His Word to help us handle the afflictions of life as a family.

Our Lord clearly states that the only ground for divorce is when the husband or wife is unfaithful to the marriage covenant by committing adultery. Even so, this is the last resort as our Lord explains to the Pharisee who asked Him why Moses commanded the writing of divorcement. Jesus says, *“Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery”* (Matt 19:8-9, cf Deut 24:1-5). In the ancient times, sinful abuse of a marriage partner was a harsh reality. Hence, Moses instituted such a regulation to protect the woman and guard the sanctity of marriage.

THOUGHT: What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. A good marriage is the union of two good forgivers.

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to fulfill my marriage vow.

PERFORM THINE OATHS

Matthew 5:33-37: *“Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God’s throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.”*

To “*forswear*” is “to swear falsely.” It is saying something without any intention to back up our words with deeds. The Christian conversation is to be honest and truthful and his words as sacred as his oaths. Jesus teaches that we are to fulfill our oaths or vows. The oaths that we make are binding upon us. They reflect our character whether we are truthful or not. Hence, we are to carefully weigh our thoughts before we voice them. Our conversation must not be a host of frivolous swearing as did the Jews in Jesus’ time. Swearing by heaven or God’s throne or by the earth or by Jerusalem or even by one’s own reputation does not make one’s word weightier.

Let our “yes” be a truthful affirmation and our “no” be a truthful negation. “There can be no excuse for lying, neither is there anything more despicable and dangerous as a liar, no man being safe who associates with him, for he who will lie and will swear to it, says a proverb, and such a one may endanger my life, turn my family out of doors, and ruin my reputation, whenever he shall find it his interest...” (Character Sketches for Boys and Girls).

THOUGHT: “No virtue of more noble worth, than truth from heaven brought to earth.”

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to bear a good testimony for Thee by my conversation so that I may be a mouth-piece worthy to proclaim Thy gospel.

RESIST NOT EVIL

The law of just retribution (*lex talionis*) provides equitable retribution for the offending party in the court of law so that the punishment matches the crime. It is meant to mete out equitable justice (Exod 21:20-25; Lev 24:17-21; Deut 19:21). This law is given so that punishments given by the judges in the civil courts in Israel will not greatly exceed the crime committed. However, this law is misconstrued as a warrant to justify personal revenge. Hence, our Lord has to clarify the true sense of this law to correct the vengeful and vindictive spirit of the scribes and Pharisees.

"Resist not evil" means "to withstand or oppose not the evildoer by adopting his uncouth ways." Let us be willing to suffer wrong and exercise forbearance in personal relationships in meekness of spirit. This is opposed to the spirit of seeking to get even for every mistreatment received. This indeed is a good opportunity to show forth a Christian's transformed heart.

Our Lord illustrates by teaching us to turn the other cheek, a most difficult way to endure insult against a person's honour. Yet it is an act that pleases our God. Even in the event of an unfair law suit against us, let the suing party have the right to claim compensation. Even if your coat is demanded, our Lord's command is to permit him to take your cloak also. The *"coat"* is a garment worn next to the skin. The *"cloak"* is the outer garment that the poor would use as a sleeping cover. This would demonstrate emphatically that we meant him no harm. It is a Roman law that a Roman soldier can order a Jew to help carry something for 1,000 paces or a mile. The command is to be willing to take even 2,000 paces. Lastly, we are commanded to be always generous and give to those who have little chance of repayment.

THOUGHT: "Do not wait for extraordinary circumstance before doing good actions, try to use ordinary situations."

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to examine my own heart.

MONDAY, AUGUST 2

MATTHEW 5:43-48

LEVITICUS 19:18, EXODUS 23:4-5

*“They are the true disciples of Christ,
not who know most,
but who love most.”*

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

Matthew 5:43-48: *“Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”*

The Old Testament laws do not teach us to hate our enemies. In fact, Moses teaches us our duty towards our enemy in Exodus 23:4-5: *“If thou meet thine enemy’s ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again. If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lying under his burden, and wouldest forbear to help him, thou shalt surely help with him.”* Also, he says in Leviticus 19:18: *“Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.”*

Our Lord gives us four commands as to how to treat our enemies – (1) love – an unconditional sacrificial love, (2) bless – ask God to bestow divine favour upon them, (3) do good – show kindness to those who continually hate us, and (4) pray – for those who mistreat and persecute us. These actions would prove our profession as children of a most loving heavenly Father. The general providence of God provides the sun and the rain to all mankind without discrimination even though the majority of mankind continues to reject Him. Therefore, our Lord concludes by instructing His people not to exhibit a love that is reactive but a love that exemplifies God’s love - perfect in its character!

THOUGHT: “O perfect love, all human thought transcending.”

PRAYER: Lord, help me to show by my life how much I owe Thee.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 3

MATTHEW 6:1-4

PROVERBS 19:17

*“The old man promotes self but
the new man promotes Christ.”*

DO NOT YOUR ALMS BEFORE MEN

In Matthew 6, our Lord will teach His disciples how they are to interact with the world so as to be a good testimony. How does the Christian live out his new life in Christ? What are the salient points that the Christian is to watch for?

George Muller testifies in his autobiography, “It is certain that we children of God are so abundantly blessed in Jesus by the grace of God that we ought to need no stimulus to good works. The forgiveness of our sins, the having been made for ever the children of God, the having before us the Father’s house as our home – these blessings ought to be sufficient motives to constrain us in love and gratitude to serve God abundantly all the days of our life, and cheerfully also to give up, as He may call for it, that which He has entrusted us of the things of the world.”

We will notice that the new life in Christ is a life that is dead to self, dead to self-glory and self-promotion. It involves a dying of the old man and a life that is surrendered to the Lord, thereby pointing others to Christ as John the Baptizer did. *“He must increase but I must decrease.”*

Therefore, our Lord Jesus commands that we be cautious to examine our motives for giving alms (vv 1-4). It must not be for man’s praise. Otherwise we will lose our Lord’s blessings. Our Lord highlighted the heinous behaviour of hypocrites who would do their philanthropy by making a public display to arouse attention so as to receive the praise of man. This is a work of the carnal old man in us. Our approval must first be from the Lord. He also shows us the need for secrecy in giving so much so that even the left hand knows not what the right hand is giving. This is true spiritual stewardship!

THOUGHT: Jesus said, *“Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”*

PRAYER: Lord, help me to examine my motive each time I give.

BEWARE OF HYPOCRISY

Jesus again asks that we take serious consideration to subdue hypocrisy and increase the grace of truthfulness in our lives. We are to be sincere in our piety, hating the evils of hypocrisy. We are to be aware of the deceitfulness of the heart. The hypocrites would love to pray standing in public places so that they may receive the praise of men. This verse certainly does not teach that we should not pray in public. Prayer is made a mockery by such hypocrites. Jesus exhorts His disciples to flee such hypocrisy.

The focus of the hypocrites' prayer is men and not God. Therefore their prayers do not reach God in heaven but only the ears of men who can do nothing to answer them nor reward them. All they can do to praise their eloquence, which is actually empty praise. Our Lord wants us to examine both our motives and our actions in every aspect of our lives especially pertaining to prayer. May the Lord help us to root out every hypocritical prayer and to plant in its place graces of truthfulness. It is a sad scene when religion becomes a show! Are the hearts of men today any more truthful than in the times of our Lord Jesus?

These timeless words by our Lord Jesus ought also to rebuke us. The evangelist Billy Sunday once observed, “Hypocrites in the church? Yes, and in the lodge, and at home. Don't hunt through the church for a hypocrite. Go home and look in the glass. Hypocrites? Yes. See that you make the number one less.”

THOUGHT: “The world is glad of an excuse not to listen to the gospel message, and the inconsistencies of Christians is the excuse.”

PRAYER: Lord, let me be truthful to Thee both privately and publicly.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 5

MATTHEW 6:6

PSALM 84

*“Him that cometh to me
I will in no wise cast out.”*

OUR CLOSET PRAYER LIFE

Matthew 6:6: *“But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.”*

There is an intentional (not an accidental) concealment of the praying saint in his private prayer. The door is not only shut but also locked to ensure privacy. His blessings come not from men but are divinely bestowed from heaven above by his Father!

This is a page out of the diary of David Brainerd, a missionary to the American Indians, on Monday, June 14, 1742, “Felt something of the sweetness of communion with God and the constraining force of His love. How admirably it captivates the soul and makes all the desires and affections to center in God! I set apart this day for secret fasting and prayer, to entreat God to direct and bless me with regard to the great work I have in view, of preaching the gospel; and that the Lord would return to me, and show me the light of His countenance. Had little life and power in the forenoon. Near the middle of the afternoon, God enabled me to wrestle ardently in intercession for absent friends. But just at night, the Lord visited me marvelously in prayer; I think my soul never was in such an agony before. I felt no restraint, for the treasures of divine grace were opened to me. I wrestled for absent friends, for the ingathering of souls, for multitudes of poor souls, and for many that I thought were the children of God, personally, in many distant places. I was in such an agony, from sun half an hour high till near dark, that I was all over wet with sweat. Yet it seemed to me that I had wasted away the day and had done nothing. Oh, my dear Jesus did sweat blood for poor souls! I longed for more compassion toward them. Felt still in a sweet frame, under a sense of divine love and grace; and went to bed in such a frame, with my heart set on God.”

THOUGHT: “We are often backsliders on our knees long before we backslide openly in the eyes of the world.”

PRAYER: Lord, please revive my closet prayer life.

USE NOT VAIN REPETITIONS

Matthew 6:7-8: *“But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.”*

The prayers of the Pharisees were ostentatious and selfish, but the Christians’ secret and godly. Our Lord now turns His focus on how we ought to pray. He expresses a strong prohibition by a negative command *“use not vain repetitions”* to forbid the occurrence of such an action. The Christian’s prayer should not be like the meaningless prayer of the heathen, which are meaningless babblings of the same words over and over again. However, this is not to teach that we should not pray the same prayer over again, e.g. persevering in prayer for our loved ones who are still outside God’s kingdom.

Remember how the prophets of Baal uttered meaningless words from morning till noon crying, *“O Baal, hear us”* (1 Kings 18:26), but to no avail. Whereas Elijah when he prayed, the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice. This is recorded in 1 Kings 18:36-37 *“And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the LORD God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again.”* The result of that one prayer by Elijah is given in 1 Kings 18:38-39: *“Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God.”* Such is the power of prayer!

THOUGHT: “Prayer requires more of the heart than the tongue.”

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, not to be saying prayers but to be praying.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 7

MATTHEW 6:9-13

ACTS 9:10-12; JOHN 3:1-7

*“Prayer is one of the surest
mark of a Christian.”*

THE LORD’S PRAYER

How do we know a person is physically alive? He breathes. How do we know a person is spiritually alive? Our Lord Jesus gave this litmus test to Ananias of Damascus. He asked Ananias to arise and go into the street called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus for *“behold, he prayeth”* (Acts 9:11).

How do you know that a baby is alive? The baby cries. By the cry of the baby, we know that the child is alive and kicking! Similarly for the child of God. How do you know if he is spiritually alive? He prays. Prayer is communion with God.

The religious leaders in Jesus’ time had a form of godliness. That is the reason why Nicodemus, a Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews had to come to Jesus to know the very basic: how to be born again. Why is Jesus most qualified to teach the doctrine of prayer? He is the Son of God (John 5:18; 10:36; 19:7), the exact representation of the Father (Heb 1:3). Jesus is God Himself. Hence, He is most qualified to teach the doctrine of prayer.

Jesus’ adopted father Joseph was a carpenter. Jesus was a carpenter before He began His ministry. The family skill of livelihood is always passed on from father to son. We call it “trade-secret.” The secret of prayer is taught to us by the Son who is from eternity past, the beginning of no beginning, in communion and fellowship with the Father. He gives to us therefore the secret of effectual communion with God the Father – the perfect pattern, model or example of how we ought to pray.

THOUGHT: “The whole Word of God is of use to direct us in prayer; but the special rule of direction is that form of prayer which Christ taught His disciples, commonly called the Lord’s Prayer.” (Shorter Catechism)

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to learn well the Lord’s Prayer.

THE PATTERN FOR PRAYER

A pattern is an original or model considered for or deserving imitation. The word aptly used by the King James translators is "*manner*," signifying the way or method or approach to prayer.

Why must the Lord teach in such an explicit manner? It is because the people in Israel, like in the days of Isaiah, were totally lost as to how to approach God. It began with the blindness of the leaders – "like people, like priest." Isaiah chides Israel for their sins especially the sin of prayerlessness in Isaiah 64:6-7: "*But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities.*"

The Lord's Prayer provides eight pertinent elements of prayer. Our Lord is giving us the principles of prayer. The believer is to express his prayer based on these principles. This is a simple and yet most profound outline on the doctrine of prayer.

- (1) Preface (v 9b): Our Father which art in heaven,
- (2) Praise (v 9c): Hallowed be thy name.
- (3) Preach (v 10a): Thy kingdom come.
- (4) Power (v 10b): Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.
- (5) Provision (v 11): Give us this day our daily bread.
- (6) Pardon (v 12): And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
- (7) Protection (v 13a): And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
- (8) Praise/Pronouncement (v 13b): For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

THOUGHT: Begin the day with solemn prayer and thanksgiving.

PRAYER: Increase my devotion to Thee, O Lord. Revive my prayer life.

MONDAY, AUGUST 9

MATTHEW 6:9b

GALATIANS 4:4-7

“Prayer is the pulse of life.”

OUR FATHER

Preface – When we visit Jerusalem and go to the Mount of Olives, there is the Church of the Paternoster. “Paternoster” is the Latin for “Our Father,” the first two words of the Lord’s Prayer. The church was built in the 4th Century and reconstructed in the 12th Century and 20th Century. The garden walls of the church are lined with the Lord’s Prayer in 62 different languages.

The opening address, “*Our Father which art in heaven,*” tells us who this prayer is directed or addressed to. It signifies the common bond and privilege of believers to approach God at the throne of grace. Martin Luther, in his small catechism, explains, “He is our true Father and we are His true children, so that we may with all boldness and confidence ask Him as dear children ask their dear father.” This is a personal as well as a corporate or congregational prayer pattern. The very word “*Father*” connotes an intimate Father-Son relationship. Jesus is the perfect example of this Father-Son relationship. Jesus, the Son, communes with the first person of the Trinity, God the Father.

We are born again by believing that Jesus, the Son of God, died for our sins and rose again the third day victorious to give us eternal life. We become the sons of God through Christ. Apostle Paul affirms this in Galatians 4:4-7: “*But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.*” The prescribed way to pray therefore is in the Spirit, through the Son, to the Father. Herein is the Pattern.

THOUGHT: “Let us draw near to God with all holy reverence and confidence, as children of a father, able and ready to help us; and that we should pray with and for others.” (Shorter Catechism)

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for this great privilege of prayer.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 10

MATTHEW 6:9b

PSALM 121:1-2

*“Knock – keep on knocking –
and it shall be opened unto you.”*

WHICH ART IN HEAVEN

Preface – Heaven is the abode of God the Father. Heaven is “Paradise” where God dwells. It is the eternal refuge promised to the dying thief on the cross who called upon Jesus, *“Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise”* (Luke 23:43). It is where the Father’s ultimate blessings await His children. Jesus gave to us a glimpse of Paradise when He said in John 14:1-3: *“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”*

The reality of heaven comes most vividly to us when we go to the house of mourning. We feel so helpless and are at a loss for words to comfort the bereaved family. It brings us face to face with our life’s ultimate enemy. It challenges us to take God at His Word that we will see our loved ones who “*sleep*” in the Lord again in heaven! The comfort of this truth causes us to seek refuge at the throne of grace, calling to our heavenly Father for solace and comfort. The Father resides in heaven and yet He hears our prayers. This is a mystery of mysteries to the unregenerate mind. But to the spiritual man, it is the greatest privilege.

The psalmist speaks in faith to His Maker, *“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.”* The LORD indeed is our Helper. So often in trial and testing, we look for help everywhere other than God. The psalmist affirms that the origin and author of his help is God, the unseen Father in heaven. This is seen by the phrase, my help *“cometh from.”* In the original, it consists of two prepositions “from” and “with” or “beside.” My help is from God who is not far away but by my side! Will you not call to Him?

THOUGHT: Intense kneeling is blessing.

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to cultivate a vibrant prayer life.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 11

MATTHEW 6:9c

MATTHEW 8:24-27

*“Praise is the most infallible sign
of the presence of God.”*

HALLOWED BE THY NAME

Praise – Having shown us who He is we pray to, His position as Father, His dwelling place in heaven or paradise, our Lord praises the Name of the Father: *“Hallowed be thy name.”*

The word *“hallowed”* comes from the root word *“holy.”* It means *“to honour as holy.”* It proclaims the holiness and sacredness of God’s Name which is worthy of our greatest fear and reverence. Why is this so? Because He has made us holy! He has set us apart for Himself as His sons and daughters. He has sanctified us, and given to us this familial relationship through His Son. Here is the connection and the rightful development of this prayer. Holiness is a communicable attribute of God the Father. Hence, it is a prayer that we may learn to revere, fear and acknowledge our God, who alone is worthy of our reverence and worship. Also, we are not made holy by ourselves, but we are recipients a passive party to this holiness. We are called saints not for what we have done to earn us this position of being *“positionally holy.”* It is solely by the finished work of the Son.

Why is the Father worthy of praise? It is the Father who so loved us that He sent His Son to save us. We have so much to thank God for. So this first petition is *“Praise.”* It is an affirmation that this most high God has condescended to be among His people. The praise of God proclaims God’s merit or worth. It is man’s most worthy and reverential acknowledgement of God. It is a sacred reverence of who God is. It is the rightful response of a filial son to his beloved Father. Why do we begin our prayer with praise? It is out of a heart of thanksgiving and gratitude for the marvelous work of regeneration wrought in our hearts. When the fearful disciples call out to Jesus, He awakes and calms the storm. And the disciples bow in worship.

THOUGHT: *“In worship, we meet the power of God and stand in its strength.”*

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to know by my prayer, how much I owe Thee.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 12

MATTHEW 6:10a

MATTHEW 28:18-20

*“The kingdom of God comes even
without our prayer, but
we pray in this petition that
it may come unto us also.”*

THY KINGDOM COME

Preach – The fact that we can be made holy must cause us to want to share this good news with others. Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones agrees, “It gives us a consuming passion that the whole world might come to know God. It means a burning desire that the whole world may bow before God in adoration, in reverence, in praise and worship, in honour and thanksgiving.” It shows forth the urgency of ushering in God’s kingdom on earth. Jesus has inaugurated His Kingship and Kingdom in His first coming but the consummation is the “*Parousia*.” This is the Greek word for the visible return of Christ to set up His kingdom on earth.

The king of this world is Satan and his time is short-lived. Judgment is coming upon this world which is lost and groaning in sin. Revelation 12:12 says, “*Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.*” This is the believer’s hope and future glory. Revelation 21:4: “*And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.*”

It is ushering the Father’s eternal blessing upon the believers that causes us to pray that He will send us forth as His ambassadors in obedience to Jesus’ first commandment to the church, “... *All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen*” (Matt 28:18-20).

THOUGHT: “In this second petition, we pray that Satan’s kingdom may be destroyed, and that the kingdom of grace may be advanced, ourselves and others brought into it, and kept in it, and that the kingdom of glory may be hastened.” (Shorter Catechism)

PRAYER: Give me grace that the gospel may be lived out in my life.

THY WILL BE DONE

Power – This third petition acknowledges the sovereignty of God that He rules over all in heaven and on earth and is in charge. There are no powers that are not subjected to the Almighty power of God. The will of God cannot be thwarted by men. This is a prayer of submission to the divine rule of God in our lives. His purpose and His good pleasure will be accomplished with or without our consent. It is a reminder for us to have a heart of discernment to know the purpose of God for our lives and to seek to do it. The word “*be*” emphasizes that God is acting to bring His will to pass. It is also a passive voice meaning we cannot frustrate God’s will but we are to align our lives to His will.

How can we know God’s will? His will is in His Word. Those who believe in the doctrine of the Verbal Plenary Preservation are often accused of worshipping the Word of God. Dear friends, it is from the written Word that we find the living Word. We cannot separate the living Word from the written Word. It is by the written Word that we know the Living Word. It cannot be otherwise for we cannot go against the truth. We preach with conviction because we have the perfect Word of God in our hands today which has the power to convert sinners. Therefore, we defend the doctrine of the Verbal Plenary Preservation of Scriptures. Our Lord Jesus Himself said “*not my will, but Thine, be done*” in the garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:42). Jesus sets for us the example par excellence. It is most difficult to fulfill God’s will in His life. The way of the cross was out of humiliation and great suffering, culminating in His crucifixion in order to win our entrance into Paradise. It is a prayer to align our will with God’s will. It is a prayer of submission. God has the power to fulfill His will but it must be accomplished according to His way with our submission to abide in it.

THOUGHT: “In the third petition, we pray that God by His grace, would make us able and willing to know, obey and submit to His will in all things, as the angels do in heaven.” (Shorter Catechism)

PRAYER: Lord, teach me the lesson of submission.

OUR DAILY BREAD

The first three aspects of the Lord’s Prayer are summed up by the first part of Matthew 6:33: *“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness.”* The second part is given in the fourth petition *“and all these things shall be added unto you.”* The 4th “P” is “Provision.”

Provision – Give to us the bread of our necessity, the bread that suffices for each day. This is a prayer to God to take care of our physical needs. May our heavenly Father supply and furnish our needs. The bread that we need, do give to us today, and day after day. This is a prayer acknowledging that God is the Sustainer of our physical well-being. The emphasis is on the action of God supplying. Notice the order of priority in the mind of God. We must always acknowledge Him first. It is a rightful attitude because we are creatures of God’s creation. The pot in the Potter’s hand is subject to the pleasure of the divine Potter.

Two men stood at the gate of a great city. While they waited, a poor woman came to ask them for a few coins to buy bread for her children. The first man scowled at the woman and said, “I work hard for my money. I give of my own time and labour. I earn what I reap. Go and do the same for yourself and your family!” The woman began to walk away, but the other man followed her and said, “Poor woman, take this money, for it is not really mine. I do work hard for it, but it is by God’s grace that I have it at all. He gave me the talents I possess, He gave me my strength and knowledge, and He has given life to us all. If I give to you, I simply give to you what He has provided.”

THOUGHT: “In the fourth petition, we pray that of God’s free gift we may receive a competent portion of the good things of this life, and enjoy His blessings with them.” (Shorter Catechism)

PRAYER: Lord, help me to receive my daily bread with thanksgiving.

FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS

Pardon – The word “*forgive*” emphasizes the nullifying of our debts. It is an entreaty to God to write off our debts. What is the meaning of “*debts*”? It refers to “that which we owe” to God. What are these? These are the sins of omission, the things that we ought to do but we do not! How is it measured? It is measured by God’s Holy Laws as summarized in the Ten Commandments.

Every born-again Christian is made “holy” by Christ’s finished work on the cross and freed from the bondage of sin. He can choose not to sin. But when he sins wilfully, he sins the sin of commission. Jesus tells us in Matthew 22:37-40: “... *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind... Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*” The positive aspect of the Ten Commandments is to love (1) the Being of God, (2) the worship of God, (3) the name of God, (4) the day of God, (5) the representative of God, (6) the body of man, (7) the morality of man, (8) the property of man, (9) the personality of man, and (10) the prosperity of man. This must be the Christian’s response constrained by God’s unconditional and sacrificial love. If we fail to exercise such love toward God and man, we need to ask for forgiveness.

Our Lord shows us the sins of commission (vv 14-15). What we ought not to do, we do (Exod 20:1-17). Here, He uses the word “*trespasses.*” The Jews know the law of God, both the positive and the negative aspects of it. Debts and trespasses together consist our sins described in Luke 11:4a, “*And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us.*”

THOUGHT: “In the fifth petition, we pray that God, for Christ’s sake, would freely pardon all our sins, which we are the rather encouraged to ask, because by His grace we are enabled from the heart to forgive others.” (Shorter Catechism)

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for the blood of Thy Son that washes away my sins.

AS WE FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS

Life lived without forgiveness becomes a prison, observes a Christian writer. This word “*forgive*” shows us that we are to continuously and repeatedly forgive our debtors. We are to continually and repeatedly forgive those who do not exercise love toward us. How often? Jesus says “*seven times seventy times.*” That means we are to forgive every time. Because Jesus has forgiven us even though we are so unworthy, we are likewise to forgive others who have offended us. God’s peace abides with the forgiver. This is the central theme of the Lord’s Prayer. An unforgiving heart will eat into our soul. Therefore this prayer is to seek God’s help to enable us to forgive others who have offended us. This is the secret to God’s blessing. We sin much daily and hardly deserve any pardon but He nevertheless forgives us. Will we not forgive others?

D. L. Moody observes, “Forgiveness is not that stripe which says, “I will forgive, but not forget.” It is not to bury the hatchet with the handle sticking out of the ground so you can grasp it the minute you want it.”

There was an occasion when two of us visited a brother in Christ in his home. His wife was not a believer. We gave her Matthew 11:28 written in Chinese characters: “*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*” She confided that this verse described her heavy heart. She felt the weight of an unforgiving heart all these years of marriage. We spent some time listening to how she could not forgive her husband. This was the burden that she could not lay down. It was so sad! Yet it is so true of so many. This is the reason why Jesus was sent by the Father. The “light yoke” is given to us when we humble our soul and come to Jesus at the cross.

THOUGHT: Forgiveness is a wonderful thing – it warms the heart and cools the sting.

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to heartily forgive and readily do good to those who sin against me.

LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION

Protection – *“Lead us not”* (Matt 6:13a) expresses a negative command or prohibition forbidding the occurrence of an action, giving a warning, an exhortation against yielding to temptation. Temptation is that which brings us down and causes us to fall; while testing or trial is that which builds us up! 1 Corinthians 10:13 tells us that for every temptation, God will provide us a way of escape. Matthew 6:13a is a prayer for spiritual strength to overcome temptation. It is a prayer for God’s protection.

The word *“deliver”* is a plea for God Himself to deliver us from evil. *“Evil”* in Greek has a definite article attached to it. It refers to the evil one, Satan himself. Only God can deliver us from Satan. Satan is the tempter. Remember how he tempted Jesus after He had fasted for 40 days and 40 nights? Jesus overcame Satan by God’s Word. Hence, this prayer is for God to equip us with the knowledge of His Word that we may use it at the right instant to ward off every temptation. This is an entreaty to the Father to help us. We are weak and easily enticed. The slippery slope begins when we expose ourselves to ungodly company or ungodly influence, perhaps through the media or the internet. It progressively leads us to fall.

It is not God who tempts. We pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us, so that the devil, the world and our flesh may not deceive us, nor seduce us into mischief, despair, and other great shame and vice. Though we are assailed by them, we can still overcome and obtain the victory. (Martin Luther’s Small Catechism)

THOUGHT: “In the sixth petition, we pray that God would either keep us from being tempted to sin or support and deliver us when we are tempted.” (Shorter Catechism)

PRAYER: Lord, teach me to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 18

MATTHEW 6:13b

REVELATION 5:9-14

*“O for a thousand tongues to sing
my great Redeemer’s praise.”*

FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM

Praise/Pronouncement (v 13b) – We begin with praise and end with praise. What do we pronounce in our praise? We pronounce the Father’s worthiness to receive all praise! This is the rightful conclusion to the Lord’s Prayer. His kingdom is a reference to His absolute dominion over all His creation. There is no rivalry to His reign. His power evokes a sense of confidence in the heart of a praying saint that God the Father is able to bring all things to pass because all power belongs to Him. His glory is manifested in His praiseworthiness for all honour must belong to Him. And yet He is the invisible God!

A glimpse of heavenly worship is given in Revelation 5:9-14. At the centre of the throne is *“the Lamb that was slain,”* a reference to our Lord Jesus with marks of His crucifixion and sufferings. Indeed the multitude of unnumbered saints ascribes all honour to Jesus because He is the visible witness of the Godhead for all eternity.

“A teacher said, ‘Boys, here’s a watch. What is it for?’ The children answered, ‘To tell the time.’ ‘Well,’ said he, ‘suppose my watch does not tell the time. What is it good for?’ ‘Good for nothing, sir.’ Then he took a pencil. ‘What is this for?’ ‘It is to write with, sir.’ ‘Suppose the pencil won’t make a mark. What is it good for?’ ‘Good for nothing, sir.’ Then the teacher asked, ‘What is the chief end of man?’ and they replied, ‘To glorify God.’ ‘But suppose a man does not glorify God. What is he good for?’ ‘Good for nothing, sir.’”

Praise, preach, power, provision, pardon, protection and praise give to us the perfect prayer pattern.

THOUGHT: The conclusion of the Lord’s Prayer teaches us to take our encouragement in prayer from God only, and in our prayers to praise Him, ascribing kingdom, power, and glory to Him; and in testimony of our desire and assurance to be heard, we say, “Amen.”

PRAYER: I praise Thee, Lord, Amen and Amen!

THURSDAY, AUGUST 19

MATTHEW 6:16

DANIEL 9:3

“Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.”

WHEN YE FAST (1)

Matthew 6:16: *“Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.”*

Fasting is a valuable aspect of Christian living in forging a closer walk with God. It is the laying aside of the common necessity of food and drink for a short season for the purpose of spending more uninterrupted time of communion with God in prayer and study of His Word. There are divine blessings from fasting. Daniel fasted that he may obtain wisdom to understanding God’s will for His people, *“And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes”* (Dan 9:3). It is an earnest and sincere humbling of self to let God be pre-eminent in our hearts.

However, we must not have the mistaken notion that we can become more spiritual by punishing our bodies through abstaining from food and drink. This religious exercise must not be used to judge whether a Christian is more spiritual. This is the third religious duty highlighted in this chapter after works of charity and prayer. This third duty is often abused by the scribes and Pharisees.

The hypocrites fasted for the wrong reason of wanting to appear to be more religious than others! They would look sad and neglect their usual dressing to depict feelings that are not in their hearts. They are like the “professional” mourners that can be hired to give an appearance of great mourning. They do so to win the praise of men and not of God. It shows forth a very shallow and earth bound religiosity. Our Lord Jesus stresses emphatically that true spirituality must live in the heart. It cannot just take on an external form.

THOUGHT: Fasting is a personal matter between an individual and his Lord.

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to fully understand the doctrine of fasting.

WHEN YE FAST (2)

Matthew 6:17-18: *“But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.”*

The secret of true fasting is to fast secretly. It is not the act of fasting but the true spirit of fasting that our Lord wants to teach us. We must endeavour to correct the malady of our heart and establish them firmly on correct principles of piety that please God. Jesus teaches that fasting in secret is pleasing to the Father and He has promised to bestow blessings for such consecration.

Fasting in secret and not in ostentation will speed us along the path of true devotion. This is the life lived by faith and not by sight. We do not need the approval of man to authenticate our spiritual vitality. True spiritual vitality comes not from man but from God. Therefore, we are to keep, watch and guard our hearts with all diligence for out of it flows our woe or reward. Our Lord wants us to examine our hearts. We must realize how important it is to protect and to preserve the purity of our hearts from the pollutions of the depraved nature that still resides within us. The way we go about our religion will give away the true condition of our hearts. Fasting is such an acid test.

Hear this testimony of a pious minister of God, “A day of fasting is of great assistance to the soul, for the better performing of holy duties, such as meditations, reading, and hearing the word, prayer, examining, judging, and reforming a person’s self; both because his spirits are better disposed, when he is fasting, to serious devotion; and the mind being so long taken wholly off from the thoughts, cares and pleasures of this life, he may be more intent and earnest in seeking of God.”

THOUGHT: Fasting renews my peace with God.

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for teaching me how to keep a fast that is acceptable to Thee.

LAY NOT TREASURES ON EARTH (1)

Matthew 6:19: *“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal.”*

As depraved earthlings, our daily struggles are often between two states. When we have plenty, we want more. When we are poor, we worry non-stop. Our Lord Jesus knows our weaknesses and offers us true wisdom. He deals with the sin of covetousness (Luke 12:15). He sees covetousness as a result of the relentless pursuit for more material possessions (Matt 6:19- 34). He addresses the weariness of worrying when there is not enough food on the table for each meal. He shows us how Christians should view their material possessions. He wants us to learn to be good stewards of our material possessions. When we have resources to invest, let us give to the extension of God’s kingdom for the saving of souls. That is the best investment which moth and rust cannot corrupt. And when we are in need, let us continue to trust God for His provision.

Our Lord in the parable on Christian stewardship commended the unjust steward for acting wisely to make provision for his future by rewriting the bill of the rich man’s debtors. He commended the wisdom of the unjust steward when He said this, *“...the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light”* (Luke 18:8b). He wants us to learn from the example of the unjust steward who made provision for his future, *“Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations”* (Luke 16:9). The *“unrighteous mammon”* (Luke 16:11) refers to the physical resources of this world. These resources are neither evil nor good. However, they are means adopted by the world for wicked purposes. But God’s children can use them wisely for God’s work so that they store up treasures in heaven by their wise investments.

THOUGHT: *“Having food and raiment let us be therewith content”* (1 Tim 6:8).

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to set my heart on spiritual things!

LAY NOT TREASURES ON EARTH (2)

Matthew 6:19 teaches us the futility of amassing earthly treasures. Set not our hearts on riches is the admonition. *"Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom. Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven"* (Prov 23:4-5).

In the past ten years, the Zimbabwe dollar has devalued so much that it has no value today. The government has resorted to printing more money to inflate away their debts. Hyperinflation in Zimbabwe began in the early 2000s. By November 2008, Zimbabwe's annual inflation rate stood at 89.7 sextillion (10^{21}) percent. The world today is moving toward this same trend with the US taking the lead by printing more money to stimulate the economy. This is called the bail-out bubble.

The US national debt stood at 12.7 trillion dollars in 2009. Over the five months following March 2009, the stock market and the property market seemed to be rising again. This is due to what is called hot-money from institutions as a result of government injections and individual investors jumping on the bandwagon.

From 1990-1999, it was the technology bubble that burst. From 2000-2007, it was the US housing sector developing into the sub-prime mortgage bubble that burst. During the peak of the 2008 global financial crisis, Singapore lost one third of its reserves. The US national debt is projected to nearly double to \$20 trillion by 2015. It is expected to increase to nearly 100% of its GDP by 2010! The numbers are of mind-boggling proportions. The lesson from our Lord is not to regard the material wealth of this world as treasures that we cannot do without for it will disappoint us!

God does however reward our honest hard work that we may enjoy the good of our labour for it is a gift from God (Eccles 5:18-19).

THOUGHT: *"Having food and raiment let us be therewith content"* (1 Tim 6:8).

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to set my heart on spiritual things!

MONDAY, AUGUST 23

MATTHEW 6:20

LUKE 12:16-21

“When I wish I am rich, then I know I am ill.” (D.H.Lawrence)

TREASURES IN HEAVEN

Matthew 6:20: *“But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.”*

Give your heart to God. Give it not to inordinate desires for more money and power. They do not give better security though we are often deceived to think otherwise. The old nature within us will seek to challenge us to have worldly ambitions. As the saying goes, “all that glitters is not gold.” Hear carefully this warning of our Lord on the dangers of a relentless pursuit for material wealth by way of this parable of a certain rich man in Luke 12:16-21. The sins associated with prosperity are denying God, forgetting and departing from Him and ascribing praise for success to self or factors other than God. There is a sense of self-conceit. Such a man is not rich towards God.

All his life, this certain man wanted to be rich. He saved every dollar he made, and invested wisely. With money came power, and his ambition was to be one of the most powerful men around. Over time, he came to desire money with all his heart. His investments became more risky to satisfy his craving. Before long, he had given himself totally to making money. This can happen to any one of us.

There was a certain German billionaire who committed suicide. His family made a statement to say that he had been “broken” by the financial crisis of 2008, and had taken his own life. What a sad ending to this man’s ambition for money and power. It did not give him any satisfaction in life and he ended it all by taking his own life. What a tragedy. Yet, why do many (Christians included) today continue in this path?

THOUGHT: “Wealth is saint-seducing gold.” (William Shakespeare)

PRAYER: Help me to give my heart to Thee and for Thy kingdom.

WHERE IS YOUR TREASURE?

Matthew 6:21: “*For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*”

We ought to be diligent in seeking the things of God, because these are things that count and last for eternity. What we do now has repercussions and implications that last for eternity for ourselves and our loved ones! God made us eternal beings. Life does not end when this earthen vessel perishes. The decisions and the paths we take in this life have eternal consequences. We are faced with choices daily! How do we know what is the right choice? How can we walk in the path of God’s blessing? Proverbs 2:5 says that if we diligently search the Scriptures we will understand “*the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God.*” The fear of God will keep us from evil (Prov 16:6), and the knowledge of God will speed us on to the path of safety for we shall be quiet from the fear of evil (Prov 1:33). May the fear of God and the knowledge of His will help guide our choices. The fear of God is most lacking today in this world before our Lord returns. May we go back to basics and be connected with the mind of our Creator.

When we apply ourselves to the study of God’s Word, we will be rich toward God, for He will show us the way of true blessing and safety. When we diligently study the Word of God, personalizing the lessons with much prayer, it will build in us a spirit of self-control, a restraining spirit, a resolute spirit to do what is right in the sight of God. It fortifies us against the seductions of worldly lusts. It internalizes for us the reason for doing what we do, so that it becomes a part of our way of life, a godly habit and heritage we can pass to our children. It internalizes for us the consequences of what we should not do, giving to us that godly instinct to respond correctly each time we are faced with a choice, that we may choose the fear of God.

THOUGHT: “If we are not nourished by the Bread from heaven, we will satiate ourselves with the crumbs from the world.”

PRAYER: Lord, help me not to think that I can live by bread alone.

IF THINE EYE BE SINGLE

Sight is the most important of our five senses. Our eye gate detects light and sends visual images to the brain. The brain will then process the information and act accordingly. The “*single*” eye is simple, innocent and sincere, healthy and clear. It portrays a singleness of purpose, of undivided loyalty towards God. The eye is a reflection of the heart. Godly sight is therefore tantamount to a pure heart. The opposite is an evil eye which looks at those things which defile the heart.

Let us resolve by deep study and meditation of God’s Word to cultivate a heart fortified with sound principles and habits that will produce a rightly-governed will against the crippling effects of evil that is deeply rooted in the core of our very fallen nature. How are we to receive this mind of God?

Proverbs 2:1 tells us that we are to do so by receiving our heavenly Father’s words as a filial son. This “*if*” is a big “*if*,” if our hearts are not quiet and hushed before Him to listen to His still small voice. The sights of this world, its allurements and its seduction are often so overwhelming. And not only must we receive the Father’s words but we are to “*hide*” it in our hearts. There is a saying that the half of knowledge is to know where to find it. But I say lovingly: the fullness of knowledge is to have it deeply ingrained in our hearts. The word “*hide*” means to “*treasure up*.” Practical wisdom for the purposes of life must be carried about with us, and be ready for use anytime.

When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, He was physically, mentally, and emotionally strained. When we are in this condition, we often lose our sense of self-control. We let our tiredness take over and we compromise for want of self-control and sense of mind. But it is not so for our Lord.

THOUGHT: Jesus’ life is not the way of great numbers or of success, but the way of faithfulness, doing the Father’s will.

PRAYER: Grant me strength to do Thy will, O Lord.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 26

MATTHEW 6:23

JOHN 3:19-20

*“Evil unchecked grows, evil tolerated
poisons the whole system.”*

IF THINE EYE BE EVIL (1)

It is observed that fungi grow best in the dark. If you turn the light on the fungus, it would wither and eventually die. Pornography addiction is the same; it thrives in darkness. Typically, pornography is done in secret, where nobody knows, and as long as the sinning remains in the dark it will no doubt continue.

A pilot confessed in the book “Setting Captives Free”: “During my years of slavery to pornography, I appeared to be a respectable man. I was an airline captain, had a degree from seminary, taught in Sunday school at our church, and appeared to have a good family. But in secret, I was a different man. As a pilot, I would stay in hotels and had much private time. The pornographic channels in the hotel room would draw me powerfully and I would give in repeatedly, year after year after year. I prayed against it, read my Bible, and planned not to fall, but as soon as I get to the privacy of my hotel room, lust would take over and I would plunge into pornography. I was living two different lives.”

He continued, “The person who is living in deceit like this will do everything they can to protect the sinful secret life from being exposed. They become angry and defensive if questioned about any possible wrong doings... What horrible hypocrisy! And so, I know first hand that people involved with pornography have a hidden secret life, and they will do all in their power to keep it from becoming exposed. And yet, this exposure is the very thing necessary to eradicating it from their lives. What was happening to me during those years that I had no power to overcome? Why did I give in time and time again, especially when I had prayed so much against falling? The answer is that this sinning was all done in secret, where sin thrives. My secret life illustrated the truth of John 3:19-20.”

THOUGHT: “Evil is sweet in the beginning but bitter in the end.”

PRAYER: Preserve me, Lord, from every evil sight this day.

IF THINE EYE BE EVIL (2)

The pilot continued, “For me, I had to throw off my TV in the hotel room, give away my computer notebook (as I was using it to do sex-chatting on the Internet), get rid of my TV at home, and avoid certain situations that tempted me. When I first confessed to my pastor that I had been viewing pornography on the road in hotels, he told me about this principle of throwing off the sin and everything that entangles. Since that which was entangling me was the TV in my hotel room he suggested I “throw off” by removing it when I got to my room before the evening. I was desperate to be free from pornography and masturbation, as by now I had pretty much stopped running the race and was entangled in sin. So, I followed my pastor’s advice and began physically taking the TV out of my hotel room. I was learning to quench myself in Jesus, so I was running to the Bible every time I felt the burning of lust rise within me. I was dragging my sin into the light, and exposing my deeds done in darkness by talking about it with my wife and my pastor. I was asking God to please reconcile me, help me to stop the evil deeds that made me an enemy of God in my mind, and now I was beginning to throw off the sin that was entangling me so that I could get back in the race... Since that meeting with my pastor in January of 1999 where he explained the necessity to throw off anything that hinders and entangles, I have not fallen to pornography one time. My decade long horrible bondage to this terrible destructive sin was over.”

The temptations of evil threaten to pull us down by what we see! May the Lord help us examine our lives and take steps to be set free from sinful enslavements. Our addiction can be to money. It can be to alcohol or it can be to gambling. It can be to violent computer games, resulting in our violent behaviour. Many who had gone that way have testified that they did not repent until they reached rock-bottom.

THOUGHT: *“But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof”* (Rom 13:14).

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be holy as Thou art holy!

SATURDAY, AUGUST 28

MATTHEW 6:24

GENESIS 4:16-26; 5:22-24

“The church has so little influence over the world because the world has so much influence over the church.”

NO MAN CAN SERVE TWO MASTERS

“*Mammon*” is the Syrian god of riches or money. This term is usually used in a derogatory sense to describe property, wealth, earthly goods. It is used to personify the worship of a different kind of god. Different from the living and true God. It is “gold” and not “God.”

The self-willed Cain built a city and glorified not God but his son Enoch. This is not the Enoch who walked with God in Genesis 5. (Genesis 4 describes the ungodly line through Cain whereas Genesis 5 describes the godly line through Seth.) There was rapid development of civilization, culture and affluence during the time of the ungodly Lamech (Gen 4:19-24). At the same time, there was great depravity. Lamech murdered a man and also a boy who perhaps got in his way. And he boasted to his wives about his murders. Man sank deeper and deeper in violence and sin amidst seeming advancement in civilization. Some generations later, during the time of Noah, God has to judge the world by a global flood. The pressure of a materialistic society dulls men’s consciences. The godly Enoch served the living and true God. He was in the world but not of the world.

The Straits Times’ report on 25 November 2009, “Violence Cuts Across All Class” says that spousal abuse – largely men hurting their wives in the privacy of their homes – remains the most common violence of family violence in Singapore. Also on the rise are cases of the elderly, children, siblings, husbands or dates being physically abused by those they love. The headlines read “More better-educated abused women, double the number in recent years, are seeking help. The victims are the more articulate, self-assured, and often juggle children and careers. Some have master’s degrees, and even PhDs.” There is economic prosperity, a thriving cultural scene and material comforts. But there is also much grief and misery in homes. Sadly, the Christian home is not spared.

THOUGHT: “It is impossible to overstate the need for prayer in the fabric of family life.”

PRAYER: Lord, help my family to pray together and stay together.

TAKE NO THOUGHT FOR YOUR LIFE

Matthew 6:25: *"Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?"*

A believer shared about the daily struggle of life when he said, "What comes from humans but it is impossible for the Lord to experience? The answer is, 'Worry.'" And by faith, he said, "What comes from God but it is impossible for humans to manufacture? Wisdom!" Finally, he said "And what is it that brings wisdom and dispels worry? Worship!" Then he concluded his assessment of the blessed Christian life when he said, "Let nothing frighten you...nothing from yesterday's past, today's present, or tomorrow's future." Our heavenly Father will take care of us. Are we looking to Him?

These words echo the teaching of our Lord which teaches listeners to cease from anxiety and worry over their physical and material well-being. Anxious care will continue to pervade the heart but the believer must continually realize that as a child of God, he is under the care of his Almighty Creator God. Jesus uses the observations of daily life and makes simple logic most powerful! God will take care of us like He cares for the birds He has created. There is more to life than subsistence. The key here is "trust." Trust God to take care of us! When anxiety overtakes us, we often speak faithless words and become fretful. Often times, they are at the expense of those closest to us. It can devastate the peace in the home. We look at the bleak outlook and we despair. Perhaps it is a loss of job, or even a sickness. Our Lord does not want us to live in such self-inflicted misery. He wants us to continue to trust in Him for He cares and He will provide for us.

THOUGHT: "A day of worrying is more exhausting than a day of work."

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to realize that worry doesn't do any good.

ARE YE NOT MUCH BETTER THAN THEY?

Matthew 6:26: *“Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?”*

Consider this: “It is easy for those who have everything they need to advise those who have not everything they need not to worry and make the best of their lot. Nothing is cheaper than advice and nothing is more common than to gravely tell other people what they should do when we really know nothing of their circumstances and trials. Why should not rich people and all those whose wants are gratified be contented? ‘Don’t worry,’ they say, ‘don’t fret, don’t get into a passion, be content with your lot.’ One might well say, ‘You exchange places with me, and I will be as contented as you are.’ Certainly, a contented mind is a continual feast, but how am I to have a continual feast when plans fail, health is broken, the wardrobe is shabby...and all things are against me?”

Yet, our Lord wants His children to realize that there is such a thing as faith in our heavenly Father and it is an indispensable thing for His children to have. We do not need to make the worst of our lot; we should make the best of it. Do we pull our hats down over our eyes and then complain that we cannot see God’s care in our lives? Our Lord says, “Look at the birds and see your blessedness.” Have an eye to see that life is beautiful with God! A Christian said well, “No outward lot can give content to a grumbling soul. And a contented spirit may be found in the humblest home. It is a great blessing to possess what one wishes, but it is greater still not to desire what one does not possess.” Our Lord Jesus uses a scene of everyday life of the enviable birds that fly so carefree to bid His people to cease from worry that often eats up the peace and joy of Christian living.

THOUGHT: “There is a man who is too busy by day, and too sleepy by night, to worry.”

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to be such a man.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 31

MATTHEW 6:25-27

PHILIPPIANS 4:6

“Ah, what is more blessed than to put cares away!”

TAKING THOUGHT

Matthew 6:27: *“Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?”*

Our Lord continues to teach the pointlessness and uselessness of anxious care. The phrase *“by taking thought”* means “caring or being anxious.” The verb *“can”* means “is able or has the power to.” The word *“stature”* means “age or time of life.” Man has no power to extend or prolong his life one bit when it is time for him to leave this world. The advancing of our aging is an irreversible process. Our Lord uses the word *“cubit,”* a measuring term for the length from the tip of our finger to the forearm to tell us that even our very height is determined by God. Can we add any height to our physique? The answer is an emphatic “no.” Yet, realize that there is a higher purpose to our existence than a mere physical existence! We are made a spiritual being and we have the ability to worship and praise God, and to call our Creator God by such an endearing term as *“Heavenly Father”*! This is not so for the birds, and yet our Father in heaven who created the birds does feed them all the same.

Therefore, there is a sense of realizing our limitation and yet realizing our privilege. In times of lack, can we not realize that God cares and will take care of us? Can we not call in faith to our heavenly Father and be patient to behold how He will gloriously supply our every need, as the Apostle Paul testified to the Christians in Philippi: *“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God”* (Phil 4:6).

God raised George Muller to testify of His glory and faithfulness. Muller established orphanages for destitute children. He testified that God alone is our helper!

THOUGHT: “The glory of God is a living man; and the life of man consists in beholding God.”

PRAYER: Help me to behold Thy glory daily in tokens of Thy care.

WHY TAKE YE THOUGHT FOR RAIMENT?

Matthew 6:28: *“And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin.”*

Our Lord gives a second illustration from the flower that is a common sight around the Sea of Galilee. The word “*consider*” here means “to learn thoroughly.” He advises listeners to realize that their common necessity, the “*raiment*” or clothing for their bodies, is needful and will be taken care of. “*Toil*” and “*spin*” denote work in general, like that of making cloth. God creates the beautiful lilies and clothes them even better than Solomon’s clothing. Will He therefore take less care of His children? Certainly not! Therefore, a Christian writer testified, “Worry is an indication that we think God cannot look after us.” It teaches us not to worry. It does not teach us not to work!

On 16 October 2008, the Singapore government announced a government guarantee on deposits of individuals and non-bank customers in banks, finance companies and merchant banks in Singapore until year-end 2010. The announcement stated that the guarantee is backed by S\$150 billion (US\$100 billion) of Singapore government reserves. It was commented that “the move was to avoid an erosion of bank deposit bases...” We remembered insurance policy holders also showed signs of panic of what will become of their policies. We saw the value of Singapore’s reserves reduced by one third as a result of panic sell-off in the stock markets around the world following the collapse of Lehman Brothers. We saw the increasing vulnerability of this world’s monetary system where governments of the world tried to solve their debt problems by printing more money. Many signs of weakness are looming on the horizon! What should Christians do if there is indeed a run on the banks and we lose our hard-earned savings accumulated over the decades? Our Lord Jesus says, “Have faith, our heavenly Father will take care of us!”

THOUGHT: “Happy is the man who is too busy to worry by day, and too sleepy to worry at night.”

PRAYER: Lord, help me to work, save and give all that I can.

EVEN SOLOMON IN ALL HIS GLORY

Matthew 6:29: *“And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.”*

The glory of Solomon in his royal robes at the height of Israel’s strength cannot surpass the beauty of the lilies in the field. Jesus gave this stark contrast to jolt His listeners to realize that the sovereign God, their heavenly Father, is the One who put Solomon there as king of Israel and honoured him to glorify His name. All that Solomon has came from God. Therefore, have a correct perspective of the sovereign Creator and give to Him due honour, glory and worship!

How is it that our Lord is able to speak with such authority (Matt 7:29)? The Bible reveals to us that all things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made (John 1:3). He created this universe by His mere spoken word. What great power He possesses! He has condescended to fallen men to make a way of salvation for them in this dying world! Can we understand the sacrificial love of our Lord in every word that He has uttered thus far? Can He, who is the possessor of all power, not take care of all who follow Him? Israel was a Roman vassel state in Jesus’ time. The Jews lived under the physical yoke of the Emperor Caesar. Jesus was asking them to look with eyes of faith and trust in the living and true God who gave even the king his glory. And He, Jesus, is the manifestation of Him!

When Jesus picked up that lily and showed it to His audience, He could speak with such authority because He was the one who had created the lily in all its beauty!

THOUGHT: “Christ’s life outwardly was one of the most troubled lives that ever lived: tempest and tumult, tumult and tempest, the waves breaking over it all the time. But the inner life was a sea of glass. The great calm was always there.” (Henry Drummond, 1851-1897)

PRAYER: Help me Father, to rest in Thy Son.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 3

MATTHEW 6:30

PSALM 103:15-18

*“Real true faith is man’s
weakness leaning on God’s strength.”*

O YE OF LITTLE FAITH

Matthew 6:30: *“Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?”*

Our Lord speaks of cultivating confidence or trust in the heavenly Father’s providential care and protection. He gives this final illustration of the grass to teach them of the frailty and transience of life and the changes that can happen from one day to another. Even the lush green grass seen in the field today can be cut the next day for use as natural fuel. Is there any security in life? The picture looks bleak! However, He wanted them to realize the privilege they have as children of God. This is the same message for us today! Where is our security? If it is in our bank accounts or our properties and investments, let us take stock and realize how insecure these are! There is security only in Jesus! When we have Jesus as our Saviour, we have everything! When we do not have Jesus, we have nothing! It is a fearful awaiting for the day of judgment when the Father will cast the unbelieving into the lake of fire that will burn eternally!

John Calvin, the theologian of the Reformation movement, made a most succinct definition of faith when he said, “Faith is far superior to human intelligence. It comes from the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Faith, thus given by God, has a twofold aspect. It enlightens the mind to understand the truth of God, and establishes the heart in it. And the Holy Spirit not only originates faith, but increases it by degrees, till He conducts us by it all the way to heaven” (2 Tim 1:14). Jesus is the object of our trust. He represents fully the Godhead and fully represents all men. He understands our anxieties and He assures us by His Word of His providential care. He can never fail us for He is God Almighty!

THOUGHT: “Little faith will bring your soul to heaven, great faith will bring heaven to your soul.” (C.H. Spurgeon 1834-1892)

PRAYER: Increase faith in my heart day by day, O Lord.

YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER KNOWETH

Do not be anxious about our supply of food, drink and clothing even though the supply runs low for we live by faith and not by sight. The promise of God’s care for us is very sure! We have to take God at His Word and experience the fulfillment of His word in our lives as He has promised. Whenever we are in need, we can call out to Him, the Owner of all things, to nourish us. He is faithful to His promise. He will take care of us. This is a truth that every child of God has to personally experience to behold His faithfulness!

Our heavenly Father has perfect knowledge of what we need and He will surely supply us with all that we need. The Father sent the Son Jesus to assure us in Person! The disciples of Jesus learnt well when He broke the five loaves and two fishes to feed the five thousand, and there were twelve baskets left over after supplying to all. Jesus is the Bread of Life! He is not only the Creator by His spoken word, He is also the regulator of it. All things are in His hands. Jesus is repeatedly emphasizing this truth. If you have God with you, fear not! He will take care of you!

Remember the widow and her son in Zarephath who by faith gave their last meal to Elijah the prophet of God? God had allowed a famine to plague the land of Israel. She trusted in the God of Elijah to help in her deepest distress. A miracle took place when she obeyed Elijah’s instruction. The little provision that she had continued to sustain her throughout the period of the famine. Truly, the LORD knows *“the days of the upright: and their inheritance shall be forever. They shall not be ashamed in the evil time: and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied”* (Ps 37:18-19).

THOUGHT: “At the root of the Christian life lies a belief in the invisible. The object of the Christian’s faith is unseen reality.”

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to trust in Thee at all times.

SEEK YE FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD (1)

Matthew 6:33: *"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."*

This is a command to persevering faith. Let us continuously put God first in our lives. There is that innate tendency to despair and lose heart which our Lord, the Great Physician of the soul, is seeking to treat. The world and its attractions and allurements have often caused many a Christian to stumble and fall. The promise of our Lord is that He will take care of all our needs when we put Him first in our lives.

We have the tendency to live our lives our own way, thinking that it is the best for us. The Lord Jesus promises to reward us for our faithfulness. He is teaching us that He knows what is best for us and that we can trust Him to take care of us. We will receive the best care.

The key word here is *"righteousness."* It is the conformity of heart and life to God's will, the divine law of God (summarized in His commandments and broadly in Holy Scriptures). We must do what is right in God's sight. This is what it means to seek Him first.

A writer said well, "Every generation has to bear its own burden, to weather its peculiar perils, to pass through its manifold trials. We are daily exposed to temptations, whether it be of idleness, self-indulgence, or vice. The feeling of duty and the power of courage must resist these things at whatever sacrifice of worldly interest. When virtue has thus become a daily habit, we become possessed of an individual character, prepared for fulfilling, in a great measure, the ends for which we were created." Is seeking God and His righteousness a habit in your life?

THOUGHT: "The strength of a man's virtue should not be measured by his special exertions, but by his habitual acts."

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to cultivate the habit of seeking Thee first in all my endeavours.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 6

MATTHEW 6:33

LUKE 11:9-10

*“Tell me to what you pay attention, and
I will tell you who you are.”*

SEEK YE FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD (2)

There is no risk in following our Lord Jesus. It is actually the safest way. He knows the end from the beginning when He urges His disciples to cultivate the courage and resolve to follow Him all the way till we see Him face to face. Here is a poem to encourage us to persevere in our endeavour to put Jesus first in our lives.

*Dare to do right! Dare to be true!
You have a work that no other can do;
Do it so bravely, so kindly, so well,
Angels will hasten the story to tell.*

*Dare to do right! Dare to be true!
God, who created you, cares for you too,
Treasures the tears that His striving ones shed,
Counts and protects every hair of your head.*

*Dare to do right! Dare to be true!
Cannot Omnipotence carry you through?
City and mansion and throne all in sight,
Can you not dare to be true and do right?*

*Dare to do right! Dare to be true!
Prayerfully, lovingly, firmly pursue
The path by apostles and martyrs once trod,
The path of the just to the city of God.*

(George Lansing Taylor)

THOUGHT: “A man’s heart has only enough life in it to pursue one object fully.”

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to be Christ-centered in each area of my life.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 7

MATTHEW 6:34

ISAIAH 26:4

*“Anxiety is interest paid on trouble
before it is due.”*

SUFFICIENT UNTO THE DAY (1)

Do not be anxious today about tomorrow. Live one day at a time trusting in the Lord.

George Muller, in practising what our Lord teaches in Matthew 6:34, “The beginning of anxiety is the end of faith; and the beginning of true faith is the end of anxiety.” He recounted this account in his autobiography, May 26, 1861 to May 26, 1862, “At the commencement of this period, I had left for these Objects a balance of £1,067 0s. 1¾d. This was the *visible* treasure to go to for meeting the necessities of the various Schools in connection with the Institution, for the circulation of the Holy Scriptures and Tracts, and for the missionary operations, which were assisted out of the Funds of the Institution. I needed therefore about seven times as much more, to be able to accomplish even as much as during the previous year, for which I had no natural prospect whatever. But while the *visible* treasure was but small, comparatively, the *invisible* one, to be drawn from, through the instrumentality of prayer and faith, was, as ever, inexhaustible; and to this *invisible* treasure, in the possession of my never failing Almighty Friend and Helper, I looked, and to Him alone... Day by day I am asking God for means for these Objects, and especially for means for labourers in the gospel, whom I seek to help. How refreshing, therefore, to receive means from all parts of the world. In the last-mentioned instance it came from a noble lady in Holland, whose heart God had moved to remember this work ... Shortly after there came in the course of my reading through the Holy Scriptures, Isaiah 26:4, “*Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength.*” – I laid aside my Bible, fell on my knees, and prayed thus: I believe that there is everlasting strength in the Lord Jehovah, and I do trust in Him; help me, O Lord, for ever to trust in Thee.”

Trusting God is strength sufficient for today and hope for tomorrow.

THOUGHT: “Anxiety does not empty tomorrow of its sorrows but it empties today of its strength.”

PRAYER: I praise and adore Thee for Thou art forever faithful.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 8

MATTHEW 6:34

PSALM 4; JEREMIAH 17:7-8

*“Change and decay in all around I see:
O Thou who changest not
abide with me.”*

SUFFICIENT UNTO THE DAY (2)

Our Lord spares no effort to allay the fears of His listeners regarding the troubles and distresses of life. Do not begin to think about tomorrow’s problems when they have not surfaced. From our extrapolation of past and present circumstances, there is that tendency to think of the worst. That is when we lose sleep in the night worrying about happenings that have not taken place. What a troublous way to live!

The psalmist gives to us the prayer of piety in trusting and hoping in God. His emotions move from a state of lament to a state of quiet confidence in God. He casts all his cares upon his LORD, pouring out every trouble of his soul to Him and prepares himself for a good night’s rest. He testified, *“I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety”* (Ps 4:8). What peace and tranquility in his soul!

In a report, according to the Singapore Ministry of Health’s public brochure on depression, “close to 9% of the adult population on our island suffer from depression and about 6% of the elderly who are above 65 years are affected. In 2001, more than 20,000 children also received psychiatric treatment in Singapore as a result of school and exam stress, exacerbated by high expectations from their parents to obtain top grades. Depression is a mental disorder that can affect anyone regardless of age, social status, cultural and economic background. Symptoms include persistent feelings of sadness, loss of interest in social activities, weight loss or gain, sleeping excessively, insomnia, agitated or restless, lacking in energy, lack of concentration, frequent thoughts of death or suicide.”

Christian adults and children too can be affected by symptoms of depression. Remember that Jesus has power over mental faculties and the Word of God, especially the Psalms is a balm for every ailing soul. May we find comfort, solace and help in prayer and His Word!

THOUGHT: “Hope is the physician of every misery.”

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to trust in Thy care for me.

JUDGE NOT

From the Christian’s attitude toward money and this world in Matthew 6:19-34, our Lord now turns to address his attitude toward a brother or sister in Christ (Matt 7:1-5).

Our Lord gives a command of admonition to His listeners to forbid them from continuously judging others, without first examining their own hearts to check if they themselves are also guilty of the same sin, lest they too be judged! It is easy to see the faults of others and to point a finger at them. Our Lord here is pointing out to us our blind spot. We can see the faults of others so starkly and clearly, what about our own sin? We have a responsibility to apply God’s teachings to our own lives before we have a holy mandate to point out the sins of a weaker brother-in-Christ. It does not mean we cannot form opinions of others. But when we condemn others for the very same sins we commit, Jesus calls this hypocrisy!

The woman who was caught committing adultery by the scribes and Pharisees was brought to Jesus. Should she be stoned according to the Mosaic Law, asked the scribes and Pharisees? Our Lord did not answer but wrote on the ground. When they pressed Him for an answer, He gave a most gracious answer, *“He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.”* Our Lord gave an opportunity for the woman to repent. She was not sentenced by our Lord immediately as advised by the scribes and Pharisees nor condemned without recourse. Indeed our Lord, the Judge of judges, was gracious to her. Who were the scribes and Pharisees to condemn her when even God was gracious to give her an opportunity to repent! Truly, this woman was restored in a spirit of meekness by our Lord. The people who heard our Lord were made to realize their own sinfulness, *“And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last.”* Praise the Lord!

THOUGHT: “Do not condemn your neighbour; you do not know what you would have done in his place.”

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to reflect upon this sin of judging others.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 10

MATTHEW 7:2

2 SAMUEL 12:1-14

*“When one knows oneself well,
one is not desirous of looking
into the fault of others.”*

IT SHALL BE MEASURED TO YOU AGAIN

Matthew 7:2: *“For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.”*

Nathan the prophet is sent to confront King David for his sin of murdering Uriah the Hittite, the husband of Bathsheba. Nathan gives David a case for judgment, *“There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds: But the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man’s lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him.”*

David’s anger is greatly kindled and he immediately condemns the rich man, *“... As the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die: And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.”* Unknowingly, it was a judgment against himself!

Nathan immediately convicts him, *“Thou art the man.”* Indeed, *“for with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.”* It must cause us not to be too presumptuous in our own self-righteousness. We do not see our own heinous sin and are yet so quick to condemn others! Our Lord points out that it speaks of the condemning party’s guilty heart. The penalty against David was exactly the judgment he meted out – a distraught family life and the death of four of his sons.

THOUGHT: “He who judges others condemns himself.”

PRAYER: Lord, help me to judge myself as a habit of true piety.

THE MOTE IN THY BROTHER’S EYE

Matthew 7:3-4: *“And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?”*

The word “*mote*” is literally “any small dry piece of straw, wood, speck, splinter, chaff, a speck of dust.” And the word “*beam*” refers to “a beam of wood, shaft of timber” that our Lord Jesus perhaps derived from a carpenter’s environment. It is intended to provide a stark contrast to help His listeners realize the common folly of human self-righteousness and hypocrisy.

A situation can be so obviously clear to the listeners and yet, for the one who is wont to condemn others, it seems so difficult to see his own sin. Let this not be said of us is our Lord’s warning. None can escape the wrath of God without first coming under the cleansing flow of our Saviour’s blood. There is no merit in ourselves for our total depravity condemns us! Hence, it must give us a different perspective, having been delivered from our own self-justification, to treat an erring brother with kindness to help him to repent and be restored from his error.

It is like persuading a Christian teenage son (who is taking his “A” Level examinations) from spending too much time on the phone with his non-Christian girlfriend whom he has been mesmerized by. If you press too hard and push too hard, it can turn him off and his heart is hardened to rebel. It is a tight rope. It is an agonizingly delicate matter to influence the son for his good. Our Lord lovingly persuades His listeners to take remedial actions to repent from self-righteousness and to be restored to the blessings of spiritual purity in self-confession and repentance. One who has been forgiven much will forgive much!

THOUGHT: “Jumping to conclusions seldom leads to happy endings.”

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to hold my tongue and to try my heart.

CAST THE BEAM OUT OF THINE EYES

We must not be judgmental of our brethren, but we must try our best to restore an erring brother in the spirit of meekness, realizing our own weaknesses first. The idea here is to be more sensitive to our own sins than being sensitive to the sins of others. Let us go to God and confess our sins completely and unreservedly, acknowledging ourselves justly condemned by the law, for if God had dealt with us after our sins, we would have died many times over. That will put us in a humble disposition to help any brother in his weakness. Very often, to our shame, our judgmental attitude destroys a brother from any hope of spiritual progress! Our Lord calls this play-acting or hypocrisy. Hence, the call to solemn self-examination!

When Jonah overcame his own prejudice and finally entered the city of Nineveh announcing God's impending judgment, *“...the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not”* (Jonah 3:5-10).

The city put on sackcloth in deep humiliation, and acknowledged their worthiness of death. This led to their salvation.

THOUGHT: Jonah first casts out the beam of self-righteousness in himself.

PRAYER: Lord, mould me and shape me to be Thy useful vessel.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 13

MATTHEW 7:6

MATTHEW 10:14

*“He that reproveth a scorner
getteth to himself shame ...”*

GIVE NOT THAT WHICH IS HOLY UNTO THE DOGS

Jesus turns now to address our attitude toward “dogs” and “swine.” Our Lord is addressing men who behave like animals such as dogs and swine. He is giving a word picture. Not only are men more like animals than humans, but more so, they are characterized by their filthy habits. This is a description of stray dogs in the streets. The swine are unclean animals who love the mud. The reference is to ungodly men who do not have the fear of God in their hearts. The “*holy*” and “*pearls*” refer to that which is sacred and precious, the Word of God. It teaches us how we are to handle those who hate the truth. The last part of this verse speaks about the harm inflicted by these uncouth individuals. To “*rend*” is a destructive term which means to “tear apart.”

The practical application is given by our Lord to his twelve disciples when He sends them forth to the work of the gospel. Our Lord teaches, “*And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet*” (Matt 10:14). He instructs His disciples to be wise to observe the preparedness of those who are given the gospel. Where they are antagonistic, withdraw yourselves from them.

The Apostle Paul in his first missionary journey preached to the Jews in their synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:14). When the Jews began to contradict and to blaspheme, Paul boldly replied, “*...It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed*” (Acts 13:46-48). Praise the Lord!

THOUGHT: “A crooked stick will have a crooked shadow.”

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to endure a scorner’s disdain.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 14

MATTHEW 7:7-8

ISAIAH 55:6-7

*“Come to the
Fountain of mercy!”*

ASK AND IT SHALL BE GIVEN UNTO YOU

Our Lord now in Matthew 7:7-11 moves from our relationship with fellow men to our relationship with our heavenly Father. The graciousness and kindness of our heavenly Father to bless His children is expressed here. God’s children are encouraged to bring their needs before the throne of grace.

As the world around us seems to become exceedingly unstable, insecure, violent, and troubled, what should be the Christian’s response to this hopeless and dying world? There seems to be times of euphoria that are soon followed by times of depression. Should we respond like the German billionaire who took his own life by throwing himself in front of a moving train? Many are falling into deep depression because they simply are at their wits’ end. No solution is forthcoming. They seem to be going through a dark tunnel without any sight of light at the other end. Dear friends, we must not live like the world, grieving and despairing. We must rise above our troubles. How can we do so? Our Lord Jesus shows to His disciples and the multitudes that He is the source and means of solving life’s problems.

Prayer is speaking to God, to be connected to the source of our blessings. Asking God requires on our part persistence, sincerity and knowledge of His will through His Word. Ask, seek and knock are three imperatives or commands from our Lord teaching us not to stop calling upon Him. What is the promise given by our Lord to every earnest petitioner? When you ask, you will be given; when you seek, you will find; when you knock, the door of God’s mercy shall be opened unto you.

THOUGHT: “Prayers go up, blessings come down.”

PRAYER: Grant me, Lord, a quiet spirit to seek Thee.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 15

MATTHEW 7:9-11

*“The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich,
and he addeth no sorrow with it.”*

PSALM 84

NO GOOD THING WILL HE WITHHOLD

Matthew 7:9-11: *“Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?”*

The kindheartedness and benevolence of our heavenly Father to give good gifts to His children is the thought for our meditation. He is most interested to answer our prayers according to our requests, as a natural father would! Why should His children not come to Him?

The lack of knowledge of the Father’s kind heart conjures up a mistaken notion that He would desire ill for His children. Therefore, we dare not ask! Our Lord wants to dispel every wrong notion of the Father’s loving heart so that His children will remember to call upon Him as a habit of life. To experience the Father’s blessings as He has promised, His children must by simple faith go to Him in prayer.

The psalmist praises in his heart the blessing of dwelling with God and God dwelling with him. This is the state of true blessedness in man according to God’s design. His close communion with his Father renders his walk an upright one! He surrenders himself to His leading whatever the end may be. This disposition of trusting God makes life most pleasant. He does not withhold good from His children. In fact, the evangelist D. L. Moody has this testimony, “God never made a promise that was too good to be true.” All His promises are yea and amen. Therefore we bless Him this day, as we bring our requests to Him.

THOUGHT: “The more we depend on God, the more dependable we find He is.”

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to see Thy loving heart and respond in filial submission to Thee.

DO YE EVEN SO TO THEM

Matthew 7:12 is an application of the second great commandment of our Lord in Matthew 22:39, *“And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”* The equitable yardstick of the law is to love our neighbour as we would love ourselves. The depraved nature loves the self more! The sanctified nature would demonstrate such kingdom grace by sacrificial love. Yet God is gracious not to exact more than we can give. The demand of the law is that we love our neighbour as we would love ourselves. How does this verse relate to the preceding verses 7-11? I believe it proceeds out of a heart overflowing with gratitude and overwhelmed by the outpouring of God’s blessing that the act of loving our neighbour is demonstrated. Hence, the conjunction of a reasonable cause *“therefore”* is used.

In the book “Character Sketches for Boys and Girls” on the topic “Starting right - the influence of home,” the writer says, “just as the twig is bent the tree’s inclined.” It is crucial to train a child to love his neighbour. The writer observes, “Only the right kind of a home can furnish the right start in the world. From a good seed and good soil grows a good tree, and even good seed cannot thrive well in a poor soil...Home is the first and most important school of character. It is there that every human being receives his best moral training, or his worst; for it is there that he imbibes those principles of conduct which endure through manhood, and cease only with life...It is a common saying, ‘manners make a man’ and there is a second, that ‘mind makes a man’ but truer than either is a third, that ‘Home makes the best man.’ For the home-training includes not only manners and mind, but character. It is mainly in the home that the heart is opened, the habits are formed, the intellect is awakened, and character is moulded for good or evil.”

Is your home a training ground for your child?

THOUGHT: Parents have a great influence over their children’s lives.

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to be a practising Christian.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 17

MATTHEW 7:13-14

ROMANS 1:16

*“Paul’s preaching usually ended
in a riot or a revival.”*

ENTER YE IN AT THE STRAIT GATE

Matthew 7:13-14: *“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”*

The “*strait*” gate is narrow and unpopular, but safe. The “*broad*” way is fashionable and well-liked, but a road that leads to destruction. The admonition by our Lord is to take care to enter into the “*narrow*” gate because it leads to life. Few will choose this way, yet our Lord wants us to be found in this blessed way.

The message of the pure gospel that “Only Jesus Saves” is increasingly becoming a forbidden message. Jesus testifies, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”* (John 14:6). This narrow way to true religion is contrasted with the broad way that claims all religions lead to God. All whose souls are awakened by the truth therefore endeavour to keep their journey on this narrow way. In the classic “A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life - The Spirit of Love,” William Law describes well the consecrated life in Christ when he said, “He...lives no longer to his own will, or the way and spirit of the world, but to the sole will of God, who considers God in everything, who serves God in everything, who makes all the parts of his common life parts of piety by doing everything in the name of God and under such rules as are conformable to His glory.”

The Apostle Paul leads the train of consecrated men in these last days before our Lord returns when he declares, *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth...”* (Rom 1:16). We are the privileged people with the message of salvation preserved in its full purity. May we not be ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation to our loved ones first and to others we will meet in life’s pathway.

THOUGHT: “Take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to Thee.”

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to maintain my course in Thy way.

BEWARE OF FALSE PROPHETS

In Matthew 7:15-23, our Lord turns to the matter of false prophets. The false prophet is not recognized by his appearance. He may appear very gentle, harmless, unthreatening and mild. Hidden to the undiscerning eye, he devours his prey by his erroneous teachings. The modus operandi is to put a little poison amidst all the truths. This poison will ultimately kill. Our Lord is warning his disciples to be on a continuous look-out for such individuals because their voices are still heard today.

A report from Denver on the topic “Faith in America” observes, “When it comes to religion, many Americans like the mix-and-match, build-your-own approach. Large numbers attend services of traditions other than their own and blend Christianity with Eastern and New Age beliefs...Although the United States is an overwhelmingly Christian country...it is as much now the norm as it is the exception for Americans to blend multiple religious beliefs and practices, says Mr Alan Cooperman, associate director at the Pew Forum ...Dr D Michael Lindsay, a Rice University sociologist of religion, said the results illustrate what he calls the ‘playlist effect’ in contemporary American religious practice. The way we personalize our iPhones, we also personalize our religious lives.”

There is an urgent need to return to the Bible, as the Christians in Berea did. They searched the Scriptures to ascertain the truth so that they might know how to walk in the way of truth. Likewise for us. It may seem so right yet it is so wrong. May we not believe a lie but be able to distinguish truth from error.

THOUGHT: “Perception of ideas rather than a storing of them should be the aim of education. The mind should be an eye to see with rather than a bin to store facts in. The man who has been taught by the Holy Spirit will be a seer rather than a scholar. The difference is that the scholar sees and the seer sees through; and that is a mighty difference.” (A.W. Tozer, 1897-1963)

PRAYER: Grant me discernment to see through the lies of Satan.

YE SHALL KNOW THEM BY THEIR FRUITS

Matthew 7:16: *“Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?”*

The false prophet teaches false doctrines in the name of God. He is identified by the wild “*fruits*” of his labour (thorns and thistles). Time will reveal the truth. Hence, our Lord directs His listeners to watch out for the end of their conversation. The false prophet by his deceit makes shipwreck the lives of those who believe his lies. Our Lord therefore warns His listeners to beware of false prophets.

In the fourth year of Zedekiah's reign as king of Judah, the false prophet Hananiah broke the yoke from off the neck of Jeremiah to signify the breaking of the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar. He falsely said that the bondage by the Babylonians was only two years (Jer 28:3) whilst Jeremiah said 70 years (Jer 25:11; 29:10). Hananiah was punished with death for making the people trust in a lie (Jer 28:15-17). Jeremiah's words were authenticated. Indeed, in 586 B.C., Jerusalem was destroyed and the Jews deported to Babylon for 70 long years, as prophesied by Jeremiah.

God's judgment for false prophets like Hananiah is given even before Israel enters the Promised Land in Deuteronomy 18:20-22: *“But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die. And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the LORD hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.”*

THOUGHT: *“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ”* (2 Cor 11:13).

PRAYER: Grant to me godly discernment to see falsehood, Lord.

EVERY GOOD TREE

Matthew 7:17: *“Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.”*

The prophet’s heavenly mandate is proved by the fruits of his ministry. The “*good fruit*” shows the prophet’s authenticity. The “*evil fruit*” is rotten and worthless. The warning from our Lord is to examine carefully the source or foundation. That will ultimately determine the fruit produced. This will help us to avoid the folly of reaping evil fruit.

One Christian writer warns of modern day false prophets who propagate their errors through educational textbooks in schools. They contradict biblical teachings, destroy the Christian way of life and advocate ungodly man-centered ideas, impacting families and the very fabric of society in the following ways:

- (1) Weaken marriage and family life
- (2) Downgrade parental authority
- (3) Downgrade traditional attitudes toward sex, morality and life
- (4) Substitute situation ethics for absolutes of right and wrong
- (5) Deny the importance of written contracts
- (6) Undermine national independence and sovereignty

Christian parents have the God-given mandate to examine carefully ideas that their children are exposed to in the books they read. Most of all, parents are to provide children with wholesome and godly teachings from God’s Word to debunk thinkings of “*faulty, humanistic foundations.*” This same writer gravely warned, “*They (bright kids)* are being trained to be leaders of a new world order.” (Italics added) From the source, whether it is pure or impure, issues principles and maxims that govern society.

THOUGHT: May the Lord preserve for us a remnant that will not bow the knee to the coming kingdom of the AntiChrist.

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to protect the minds of my children from ungodly influences.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 21

MATTHEW 7:18

PSALM 1

“Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what ...ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness.”

GOOD FRUIT

Matthew 7:18: *“A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.”*

The good fruit of a godly man is a godly life of fruitfulness. Such a man is described in Psalm 1:1-3. The godly man protects his mind by a deliberate “walk” away from ungodly advisers (v 1a). Neither does he take the next step of aligning himself with sinners by taking a stand on sinful ways (v 1b). Nor does he make himself comfortable in the company of mockers of God (v 1c). He excels in his delight for God’s Word by cultivating the good habit of appropriating and hiding God’s Word in his heart (v 2). Such a man flourishes spiritually (v 3). His spiritual vitality is often times proportional to the trials that he faces in life. Although pressures of life may be great, God gives him a sufficient portion of His grace each day.

The ungodly produces evil fruit out of a corrupt tree. It is contrasted for us by the psalmist (vv 4-6). The ungodly is like chaff whereas the righteous are like a living, fruitful tree. Chaff is something that is easily driven away and scattered by the wind. Chaff gives an image of lightness, instability and worthlessness. It is a figure of judgment. Winnowing is the process of separating and driving off the chaff from grain by means of wind (v 4).

Thus, the blessing of the righteous is that they do not stand among sinners (v 1), and the punishment of the ungodly will be that they shall not stand among the righteous in the judgment (v 5). In the day of God’s judgment, the lost sinner has no standing in that judgment except to accept sentencing for eternal damnation. There is that fearful looking of judgment to come. The psalm begins with the word “blessed” and ends with the word “perish” as a stark contrast for us to make a careful choice for our eternal well-being.

THOUGHT: If we love not the book of life on this earth, the same book will in the day of judgment be a book of judgment.

PRAYER: Help me to love Thee with all my mind, soul and strength.

CAST INTO THE FIRE

Matthew 7:19-20: *“Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.”*

Christians living in this momentous time before our Lord’s return must not walk after their own lusts like the scoffers. The scoffers’ mode of operation is their fallible sight. Whereas for us, it is by hindsight, based on God’s revelation in His written Word! The world that we live in now is reserved for judgment by fire, just as the antediluvian world before the global flood in Noah’s time. While the Lord tarries in His coming, opportunity after opportunity is given for all to make right with their Maker.

Our Lord Jesus warns that all who do not belong to Him, cannot bring forth any good fruit and are reserved for judgment in hell fire. The word “cast” is in the passive voice. In the day of reckoning, our Lord will Himself do the casting of unrepentant sinners to the everlasting torment of hell fire. For the redeemed, the Apostle Paul, one born out of due time, has these words of advice, *“This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But ye have not so learned Christ; If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness”* (Eph 4:17-24).

THOUGHT: “Many of the insights of the saint stem from his experiences as a sinner.”

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to be holy.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 23

MATTHEW 7:15-21

JUDE 11; ROMANS 16:17-18

“False prophets are both dangerous and deceptive.”

LORD, LORD

Matthew 7:21: *“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.”*

Our Lord pronounces severe judgment on false prophets. They cannot enter heaven. They are not born-again. They are called *“pseudo-prophets”* (v 15), not genuine prophets but counterfeits.

The evil fruits (vv 16-20) refer to the carnal lives (thorns and thistles) of these false prophets. They do not live a life of holiness. There is no genuine repentance from sin! The book of Jude identifies the characteristics of false prophets by exposing their impure hearts (Jude 11). Cain worshipped God unacceptably in his own way (Gen 4:1-12). Balaam prophesied for filthy lucre (Num 22-24). Core sought to usurp the authority of Moses and Aaron (Num 16). Each of them was judged severely by God (Gen 4:12; Num 31:8, 16; 16:32). Interestingly, the writer of Jude emphasizes the need to earnestly contend for the faith by examining the lives of the ministers of God’s Word. It is not just what they say but who they are!

Apostle Paul makes a noteworthy assessment of false prophets when he observes the need to check both their doctrine and life, *“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple”* (Rom 16:17-18).

THOUGHT: “The centre of God’s will is our only safety.”

PRAYER: I will keep Thy statutes, O forsake me not utterly.

HAVE WE NOT PROPHESED IN THY NAME?

The good works of the false prophet do not count towards his salvation in the Day of Judgment. Salvation is never by works. It is always by grace through faith lest anyone should boast (Eph 2:8-9). The Apostle Paul says, *“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved”* (Rom 10:9).

The profession of the false prophet is merely outward. It is void of true repentance in the heart to the acknowledging of the truth. Jesus points out to Nicodemus who is a Pharisee (a learned man in the Word of God yet spiritually blind) that unless he is born again, he cannot “see” nor “enter” the kingdom of God. When he repents he is gloriously saved and becomes a true disciple of Christ. He demonstrates good fruit by his good work of preparing Jesus’ body for burial (John 19:39) according to God’s will. Nicodemus shows forth true faith by his works.

False prophets demonstrate “works” without possessing true faith. Their works are therefore vain in the sight of our Lord Jesus in the Day of Judgment. They invoke the name of Jesus but our Lord does not recognize or know them. It is a solemn message for all who preach and perform acts of casting out demons and even works of miracle in the name of Jesus Christ. Be not ignorant of this truth, “Ye must be born again!” In Pilgrim’s Progress, “Ignorance came to the gate of the Celestial City without a certificate of salvation. He testified, ‘I have eaten and drunken in the presence of the King and has taught in our streets.’ So the angels went in and told the King that Ignorance had arrived. But the King spoke, ‘Take him out, bind him hand and foot and take him away.’ Then they took him up and carried him through the air to the door that I saw in the side of the hill, and cast him inside. Then I saw that there was a way to Hell even from the gates of Heaven.” What a grim scenario!

THOUGHT: “He who serves God has a good master.”

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to be sure that I serve Jesus.

I NEVER KNEW YOU

The word *“iniquity”* means “lawlessness.” The false prophet’s life is in violation of God’s holy laws. He has not the righteousness of Christ. Our Lord therefore tells him honestly on the day of reckoning that he cannot get into heaven. All the *“good works”* that he claims to have done are not accepted by our Lord. This is indeed the greatest tragedy. May the Lord help us to believe the Jesus of the Bible!

The biblical doctrine of salvation by grace alone (Eph 2:8-9), faith alone (Rom 5:1-2), and Christ alone (1 Tim 2:5; Acts 4:12) has been undermined by the Roman Catholic Church. There is no salvation in believing a false gospel which is not according to Scriptures.

The Bible teaches that Christ is one person with a fully divine and a fully human nature. His natures are without mixture, without change, without division, without separation. This simply means that “the entire complex of attributes of His deity was maintained fully in all points and at all times but also without contradiction or confusion, the entire complex of attributes which are essential to the nature of man has been maintained at all points and at all points since His incarnation” (Jeffrey Khoo). There are six heresies that attack the person of Christ. They either deny the genuineness (Ebionism) or the completeness (Arianism) of Jesus’ deity, deny the genuineness (Docetism) or the completeness (Apollinarianism) of His humanity, divide His person (Nestorianism) or confuse His natures (Eutychianism). All departures from the orthodox doctrine of the person of Christ are simply variations of one of these heresies” (Millard J. Erickson).

THOUGHT: “Error, indeed, is never set forth in its naked deformity, lest being thus exposed, it should at once be detected. But it is craftily decked out in an attractive dress, so as, by its outward form, to make it appear to the inexperienced (ridiculous as the expression may seem) more true than truth itself.” (Irenaeus, Against Heresies 1.2)

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to ascertain the truth in Thy Word for my eternal blessing.

A WISE MAN

Matthew 7:24: *“Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock.”*

Our Lord Jesus emphasizes the need not just to hear His teachings but to obey them for our spiritual well-being. He has spoken much. It is now consecration time. He urges them by an architectural illustration to follow the wise man's example of building his house upon a rock that can withstand the storms and floods. In contrast, the foolish man's house built upon sand is easily destroyed.

The foundation of our spiritual life is the Living Word Jesus Christ and the written Scriptures. In fact, we know the Living Word through the written Word, hence the importance of God's Word for our spiritual well-being. The Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:10-11, *“According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”*

How have you been building your life? Is every decision according to God's Word? It is not an impossible task but is very realistic. We need to take time to know God's will by studying His Word. This is true wisdom. Every decision made against the will of God cannot stand in the day of judgment. 1 Corinthians 3:12-14 says, *“Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.”*

THOUGHT: Am I building on the solid Rock?

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to consult Thee for every decision.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 27

MATTHEW 7:25

JOB 1:18-21

*“Bear patiently the
cross of grief or pain.”*

IT FELL NOT

Matthew 7:25: *“And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.”*

How strong is the foundation of your faith? Only by a consistent and deep study of God’s Word can we build a strong spiritual foundation in God’s truth that can help us through the vicissitudes of life. Are you actively studying the Bible in a Bible study group in your church? This is vital for spiritual growth. It is not enough just going to church on the Lord’s Day for one sermon a week. We must study the Bible and appropriate the lessons daily so that listening to the Sunday sermon is like the final cherry we place on the finished cake.

Inadvertently, some have suffered much because of some traumatic events in life which they are unable to come to terms with. I remember the time when one of our elderly members went home to be with the Lord. I was at the mortuary with the deceased’s family. There was a lady sitting nearby whose husband had passed away suddenly. I remembered how her friend told to her to take a deep breath to calm herself down before she went into the mortuary to identify her husband’s body. It was a deep affliction. Job too experienced a traumatic event in his life. Besides his assets, he lost all ten of his children at once. There was deep grief, yet he surrendered himself to God’s will at the critical moment. Job 1:20-22 says, *“Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, And said, Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.”* Job was not aware of the spiritual battle in heaven but his faith did not waver. He stilled his heart before the Lord. Job’s consistent and active devotional life helped him to give a God-honouring response in the most severe test of his life!

THOUGHT: Be still, my soul, the Lord is on thy side!

PRAYER: Sustain me, Lord, in my adversity by Thy promises.

A FOOLISH MAN

Our Lord has spoken at length not to put our trust in any other security but in Him. He has reached the conclusion of His discourse and here He is pronouncing judgment upon all who will not heed His warning! The foolish man knows the truth but will not obey. He builds his life upon an unstable and unreliable foundation.

Solomon lived a full life on earth. It is interesting that he delineated the purpose of life in the concluding thoughts in the book of Ecclesiastes during his old age. *“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil”* (Eccles 12:13-14).

The blueprint for a successful Christian life is so simple: Fear God and keep His Commandments! Let us observe that Solomon took his entire life to learn this vital lesson which we will do well to learn too for our spiritual vitality and well-being. The fear of God keeps us away from sin, knowing that God sees and He judges! There is a definite article attached to God in the original, *“fear the God,”* the living and true God. The first occurrence of *“the God”* in the Old Testament is in the life of Enoch, the man who walked with God and pleased God by his overcoming faith (Heb 11:5-6; Gen 5:22-24). Wickedness was great during Enoch’s time. He was the great-grandfather of Noah. God judged the world by a global flood as a result of man’s wickedness (Gen 6:5-7) a few generations later. Noah is the other man that walked with *“the God”* (Gen 6:9) amidst great unbelief. Was it an easy walk to obey God’s Word by building the ark? Remember, only eight were saved among possibly a billion people on earth at that time! It takes much courage to walk in obedience to His commandments amidst rampant lawlessness. The foolish man is the majority who believed not the Word of God and perished.

THOUGHT: *“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment...”* (2 Cor 4:17).

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to hang on to Thy promises and not let go.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 29

MATTHEW 7:27

GENESIS 6:13-22; 2 PETER 3:10-14

“Regret is an appalling waste of energy; you can’t build on it. It is only good for wallowing in.”

GREAT WAS THE FALL OF IT

Matthew 7:27: *“And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.”*

This grim picture of destruction for the house that is built on sinking sand must provoke us to wake up from our spiritual slumber!

The global flood that destroyed all the inhabitants on earth except Noah’s family of eight is a solemn reminder for us to take heed of the warnings in God’s Word. How are you living your life? Is your foundation securely anchored in Jesus? This is the only sure way to escape the coming judgment of God by a flood of fire.

Do we brush aside God’s truth as the scoffers in Noah’s time did? The Apostle Peter warns us that unbelief will be prevalent before God’s coming judgment: *“Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished”* (2 Pet 3:3-6).

What about our loved ones who are still outside God’s kingdom? Will they perish because we are too busy with our own lives to share with them the true meaning of life? Must God forcefully stop us by a grievous chastisement? May the Lord help us to realize the imminence of the rapture (1 Thess 4:14-17).

THOUGHT: Set my affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

PRAYER: Help me to live a holy life to Thy glory!

ONE HAVING AUTHORITY

Matthew 7:28-29: *“And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”*

The people were amazed at His teaching for Jesus spoke authoritatively and infallibly the Word of God. He speaks with great power and authority because He is the Source of all Wisdom. He is God, the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15). Our Lord Jesus is God’s final revelation to all mankind (Heb 1:1-2a). One writer puts this thought very well: “The story of divine revelation is a story of progression up to Christ, but there is no progression beyond Him.” There is no greater authority than Jesus’ authority. It is now nearly 2,000 years since these words were spoken. Yet, the authority of Jesus’ words has not diminished one bit. This present generation of Christians continues to be governed by these same words in Matthew 5-7, perfectly preserved in our hands today. We marvel at the truth of these words, for we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth (2 Cor 13:8). These are the same words that can transform our lives!

We affirm the deity of Christ Jesus from Scriptures. It is written or it stands written that Jesus is:-

- (1) The Prophet of prophets (Heb 1-2a)
- (2) Heir of the universe (Heb 1:2b)
- (3) Creator of the Universe (Heb 1:2c)
- (4) Glory ineffable (Heb 1:3a)
- (5) Exact representation of God (Heb 1:3b)
- (6) Sustainer of the Universe (Heb 1:3c)
- (7) Saviour of all mankind (Heb 1:3d)
- (8) Reigns in heaven (Heb 1:3e)
- (9) Superior to angels (Heb 1:4)

THOUGHT: “In most trials, people are tried for what they have done, but Jesus was tried for who He is.”

PRAYER: Help me, Father, to receive Thy Son’s words with yea and amen.



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