

THE FEASTS OF THE JEWS

MEMORY VERSE: “Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles: and they shall not appear before the LORD empty” (Deuteronomy 16:16).

TEXT: Deuteronomy 16:1-22

In the previous chapter, Moses restated the laws of the sabbatical year that centred on debt forgiveness and release of servants. These laws underscored God’s great concern and care for the poor, the needy and the oppressed. A good part of God’s provision for His children are to be directed towards relieving the poor so as to eliminate needless poverty in the land. The chapter closed with focus on the laws which required the first born of beasts to be set apart for feasts and sacrifices.

Our study today centres on the repetition of the laws concerning the three major annual feasts of the Jews namely, the Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. Generally, the feasts of the Jews were divinely instituted as religious celebrations to commemorate God’s great acts of salvation and mercy in the history of His people. They were referred to as “**the feasts of the Lord**” because He appointed them and gave comprehensive laws concerning their observance (Leviticus 23:2). The three major feast being considered in our text today are also known as pilgrimage feasts because all males among the children of Israel travelled to Jerusalem to observe them in the temple. The Passover, unleavened bread and firstfruits are observed at the same time, at the same gathering and at the same place.

Question 1: *Name the great annual feasts of the Jews and their timing as outlined in our text.*

The feast of Tabernacles (15 day of the 7th month) was preceded by the Trumpets (1st day of the 7th month) and the great day of Atonement (10th day of the 7th month) so that the three can be attended in a 22 day period (Leviticus 23:24-27,33,34; Numbers 29:1,7). Thus, all the yearly feasts can be observed in three pilgrimages (Deuteronomy 16:16).

The feasts of Passover and unleavened bread are tied together and commemorate the same event. As it were, the children of Israel observed only the Passover once all through 39 years of their wilderness journey (Number 9:1-14). Emphasis on these laws was most necessary because the children of Israel were now ready to enter into Canaan where the circumstances of the wilderness wanderings which precluded their observance of these laws would be non-existent. Furthermore, the relatively uninformed new generation of Israelites needed to realize that these feasts were very cardinal to their religious life as a nation and that the laws governing them required strict compliance. It is also the responsibility of faithful ministers of God to regularly put the people of God in remembrance of salient biblical doctrines on which believers’ faith stand though they knew them before (2 Peter 1:12; Jude 5).

THE FEAST OF PASSOVER AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE (Deuteronomy 16:1-8; Exodus 12:1-27; Numbers 9:1-14; Leviticus 23:1-8; 1 Corinthians 5:7,8)

The feast of Passover was ordained to be observed yearly in the month of Abib to commemorate the great deliverance God granted the children of Israel from Egyptian captivity. The law of Passover was so solemn that it made the whole month, in the midst of which it was placed, considerable. **“Observe the month of Abib, and keep the Passover unto the Lord thy God: for in the month of Abib the Lord thy God brought thee forth out of Egypt by night”** (Deuteronomy 16:1). Although one week of this month was to be kept, the preparations preceding it must be so solemn and the reflections upon it afterwards so serious, as to amount to the observance of the whole month.

The Passover feast was characterized by choosing the Passover lamb on the tenth day, killing the lamb in the evening of the 14th day, roasting the lamb and eating it sometime in the night with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. They ate the meal in haste, standing fully dressed with sandals on, loins girded and staff in hand as in readiness to embark on an urgent journey. Some modifications are apparent from our text: One, the sacrificial animal could be **“...of the flock and the herd..”** (Deuteronomy 16:2) whereas only lambs were used before now. Two, the pascal lamb could be sacrificed only **“...in the place which the Lord shall choose to place his name there”** (Deuteronomy 16:2,5) while individuals' houses were used previously. The confinement of the Passover sacrifice now to the sanctuary was to make the feast free of carnal human inventions that could have been introduced by some individuals in their homes. Good supervision of the exercise by the priests was also better enhanced.

Question 2: *What does the absence of leavened bread in the Passover feast of the Jews signify for present day believers?*

The feast of unleavened bread was connected with the Passover and lasted for seven days. Throughout the seven days of the feast, no leavened bread must be found in their houses (Deuteronomy 16:8). The bread they were confined to is here called **“the bread of affliction”** (verse 3) because it was neither tasty nor easy to digest, thus, signifying the heaviness of their spirits while in Egyptian bondage.

Question 3: *What lesson(s) can we learn from Moses' instruction to the children of Israel to observe the month of Abib?*

The Old Testament sacred seasons with the accompanying elaborate sacrificial systems, rituals and ceremonies, have no place in our present gospel dispensation as they have been done away with through the redemptive work of Christ on the Cross. Nevertheless, the esteemed status accorded the month of Abib by the children of Israel is significant for the present day believers. It teaches us that as believers, our real history begins at conversion (from the moment we are delivered from the bondage of Sin and Satan). We should observe such dates by way of sober reflections, stocktaking and renewal of our commitments and consecrations in appreciation for what the Lord has done in our lives. Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us (1 Corinthians 5:7). Before Christ went to the Cross, He instituted the Lord's Supper in the place of the Passover and enjoined His disciples, and by extension, every believer to regularly observe it in remembrance of Him. Every believer is hereby commanded to purge out therefore the old leaven, and keep the feast of unleavened bread of sincerity and truth (1 Corinthians 5:7,8). **THE FEASTS OF WEEKS AND TABERNACLES** (Deuteronomy 16:9-17; Exodus 34:22,23; 23:16; Numbers 28:26-30; 2 Chronicles 8:13; Acts 2:1; 1 Corinthians 16:8).

The next great feast of the Jews is the feast of weeks which is also known as Pentecost from its being the fiftieth day after Passover. After the Passover, from the day they began to

put the sickle to the corn, seven Sabbaths were numbered. **“Seven weeks shalt thou number unto thee: begin to number the seven weeks from such time as thou beginnest to put the sickle to the corn. And thou shalt keep the feast of weeks unto the LORD thy God with a tribute of a freewill offering of thine hand, which thou shalt give unto the LORD thy God, according as the LORD thy God hath blessed thee”** (Deuteronomy 16:9-16). This feast of weeks is also known as the feast of harvest because the main harvest was done at this period. Pentecost was a celebration of harvest, a holy Sabbath and a time of giving liberally to the Levites, strangers, orphans, etc. The people also gave freewill offerings to the Lord and offered additional sacrifices. The main distinct feature of Pentecost was the presentation of two loaves of leavened bread seasoned with salt to the Lord (Leviticus 23:17,20). Pentecost had agricultural significance for the children of Israel because it marked the completion of barley harvest and the peak of wheat harvest.

The third great annual feast of the Jews is the feast of Tabernacles. This began on the fifteenth day of the seventh month (Tisri) and lasted for seven days (Leviticus 23:34; Deuteronomy 16:13). This was also referred to as the feast of ingathering because it began after the vintage and gathering of olives and all other summer fruits were over. The first and the last days were holy convocations and special sacrifices were offered. During the feast, the children of Israel left their houses and dwelt in booths made of tree branches. They were required to rejoice with their families, the strangers, the fatherless and the widow (Deuteronomy 16:13,14). These feasts reminded the children of Israel that they dwelt in booths all through the forty years of their wilderness journey.

Question 4: *What were the common laws that regulated the observance of the three annual feasts of our consideration?*

Some of the commands which were common to the three main annual feasts as detailed in our text are instructive: One, the feasts were to be kept in the place which the Lord shall choose (Deuteronomy 16:2,5,6,11,16). The emphasis on holding these three annual feasts at the same place is to keep the Israelites faithful and constant to the established pattern of worship. They were forbidden from offering these sacrifices within their gates away from the supervision of the appointed and faithful ministers of the sanctuary (the priests) as this could make them prone to deviations, foolish inventions and adulterations. This teaches us that in Christian assemblies, activities in worship must be regulated by scriptural standards. Overseeing ministers must be diligent to supervise the activities in worship and our general church life to ensure things are done scripturally, decently and in order.

Two, the gathering of the children of Israel at these feasts helped to foster national unity and promote the spirit of brotherhood among them. Similarly, the Scripture enjoins us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together as believers today (Hebrews 10:25). The joy of enriching and fulfilling fellowship, unity and love, cooperate anointing, unusual and spectacular answers to prayers are some of the benefits awaiting each of us as we congregate in holy worship. Three, none was to appear before the Lord empty. Each person must come with a freewill offering at these feasts according as the Lord had prospered him. From this, we learn that giving is part of worship and it will amount to insincerity, unfaithfulness and irreverence if we fail to give to God in proportion to the level of blessings He has bestowed on us.

Four, the feasts were to be celebrated with joy and festivity. All Israelites, their servants, widows, strangers and orphans were to share in this joy. As God’s people, they were expected to be joyful on account of God’s goodness and bountiful blessings bestowed upon them. If those under the law could rejoice, believers that are under the grace of the gospel must rejoice more. We are commanded to **“rejoice evermore”** and to **“rejoice in**

the Lord always” in times of pressure, persecution and pain (Philippians 4:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:16; Matthew 5:11,12; Acts 5:41; 16:25,26). It is only those who are born again and are at the centre of God’s perfect will that can rejoice in troublesome times (1 Peter 1:3-8; Acts 16:25-26). But our rejoicing must be free from all forms of frivolity and carnal festivities found among worldly people. As we celebrate the good things the Lord has done for us, we should take good heed to stay within the confines of edifying and acceptable Christian behaviour (1 Corinthians 8:23,31).

Question 5: *Why were the children of Israel instructed to give liberally to their servants, the widows, strangers and orphans during the feasts and what challenge can believers receive from this?*

The children of Israel were to remember the less privileged in their midst and make them partake in their joy. They must remember they were once under-privileged as bondmen in Egypt but now set at liberty. This teaches us that every gracious act of divine intervention that brings deliverance from bondage or adversity should make us compassionate towards those who suffer similar fate in life. Also, as believers delivered from the bondage of sin, we should be moved with compassion to win the lost to the Saviour. In general, our spiritual and eternal redemption by Christ should serve as a constant inducement to obedience and performance of good works.

PRECEPTS ON THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE AND ACCEPTABLE WORSHIP (Deuteronomy 16:18-22; Exodus 18:21-27; Exodus 23:8; 1 Corinthians 6:1-7).

In the later part of our text, Moses took time to instruct the children of Israel on the subject of administration of justice. **“Judges and officers shall thou make thee in all thy gates, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, throughout thy tribes: and they shall judge the people with just judgement”** (Deuteronomy 16:18). The judges were to try and pass sentences while the officers executed their sentences. While in the wilderness, they had judges according to their numbers: rulers over thousands, hundreds, etc. (Exodus 18:25). But in the land of Canaan they must have them according to their towns and cities in all their gates. This would give the people easy access to justice. The higher court (the great Sanhedrin) consisting of the Priests, the Levites and the chief of the fathers of the children of Israel, sat at the Sanctuary in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 19:5-8). These judged the people as well as took care of appealed cases to the higher court.

Four basic Laws of justice are highlighted in the text: one, **“thou shall not wrest judgment”**; two, **“thou shall not respect persons”**; three, **“neither take a gift”**; and lastly, **“that which is altogether just shall thou follow”**. Strict adherence to these laws was required to guarantee justice and fairness to all. In these laws we see God’s attributes of absolute justice, impartiality and non-respect of persons. These characters were indispensable for those who were appointed judges. The injured must be appeased and the offender punished. They must judge the people with just judgment. It is only then that God’s favour and their continued stay in the land of Canaan can be guaranteed (Deuteronomy 16:20).

Question 6: *How can we promote a sense of fairness, Justice and equity among brethren in the church today?*

Such courts of law as applicable in the Jewish theocratic system have no place in the New Testament church today. The church and the secular state are two separate and distinct entities with the provision of justice as the sole responsibility of the latter. Nevertheless, the principles and rules of justice as enunciated in our text are applicable to the resolution of disputes and controversies among brethren in the church today. The

Scripture forbids members of the body of Christ from taking one another to the law to be judged by unbelievers as this would be a dishonour to their character as saints. Leaders in the church who handle disputes and investigate matters must be God-fearing, hating covetousness and free from tribal sentiments and sectional interests. They must not allow personal considerations or prejudice to intrude into their duties. They must not have respect of persons.

In verses 21 and 22 of our text, Moses instructed the children of Israel against all forms of conformity to the idolatrous customs of the heathen around them in Canaan. They were prohibited from planting groves or any tree near God's altar in order not to give it the appearance of the altars of false gods. The heathen nations in Canaan planted groves around idol temples for the purpose of obscene worship performed in them. God did not want anything that will give even the slightest suggestion of impurity about His altar and worship.

Finally, Moses reminded the children of Israel of God's law which prohibits image worship. **"Neither shalt thou set thee up any image; which the Lord thy God hateth"** (Deuteronomy 16:22). This reminder was timely as the children of Israel were about entering into the land of Canaan where they might be exposed to the temptation to copy the idolatrous practices of the heathen nations around them. The human mind is always craving for visible representation of God in an attempt to make Him real to the physical senses. But God is a Spirit and He wants to be worshiped in Spirit and in truth; He does not want to be equated with a mere human creation. God always wants the exclusive affection and loyalty of His people as He does not tolerate spiritual infidelity.

Lesson 496

JUSTICE AND KINGSHIP IN ISRAEL

MEMORY VERSE: "According to the sentence of the law which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee, thou shalt do: thou shalt not decline from the sentence which they shall shew thee, to the right hand, nor to the left" (Deuteronomy 17:11).

TEXT: Deuteronomy 17:1-20

In closing the previous chapter, Moses had charged the people to raise judges and officers in all the cities, who should rule without respect of persons, do justice to all and adhere strictly to divine commands. He also admonished them to detest idolatry and the worship of images.

In the chapter under consideration, he continued his charge to them to avoid idolatry in every form. He specified the pureness and perfection expected of every sacrifice brought before the Lord and recommended capital punishment for defaulters. Indeed, the chapter is an extension of his previous commands concerning the evil of idol worship, authority of priests and judges, and the election and duties of kings in Israel.

As the best of all Beings and the sole Source of all things, God deserves nothing but the very best. He is to have the highest honour and worship. Whatever is offered to Him must be of the highest quality, **“For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible... all things were created by him, and for him”** (Colossians 1:16). And, He is worthy **“to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created”** (Revelation 4:11). Therefore, He commanded the children of Israel not to offer any creature that had any blemish in it as a sacrifice to Him.

In the Old Testament, the offering of sacrifices was regarded as a divine institution. God himself appointed it as a form of acceptable worship if done according to His commandments. Abel offered a sacrifice **“of the firstlings of his flock”** (Genesis 4:4; Hebrews 11:4). The same practice is continued down the patriarchal age (Genesis 8:20; 12:7; 13:4,18; 15:9-11). In the Mosaic period, God prescribed definite laws regarding the different kinds of sacrifices that were to be offered and the manner in which the offerings were to be made. However, a distinction was made between clean and unclean animals (Exodus 12:5; Leviticus 22:21-25) because God is holy and would not accept anything that assaults His nature.

Any creature that is deformed, blind, broken or blemished should not be brought into the sanctuary as offering; it must be pure and perfect (Leviticus 22:21,22). The sacrifices must be so because they were types of Christ, who is a Lamb without blemish or spot (1 Peter 1:19), perfectly pure from all sin and appearances of it. Thus, we are to serve God with the best of our abilities, time and possessions.

Question 1: Compare Old Testament sacrifices with Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross.

Old Testament sacrifices belonged to a temporary economy and a system of types and emblems which served only their purposes. They were only the **“shadow of good things to come”** and pointed the worshippers to the coming of the great High Priest, who, in the fullness of time, **“was offered once for all to bear the sin of many.”** Through **“one sacrifice for sins”** He **“hath perfected forever them that are sanctified”** (Hebrews 10:14). Therefore, the dispensation that consisted of the offering of bulls, rams and goats for the remission of sins is gone forever. Today, Christ is the perfect sacrifice to take away sins and to atone for our transgressions (compare Leviticus 4:26; 5:6,10 with Hebrews 9:26,28). Hence, believers are to offer themselves unto God as **“a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God”**

It is worthy of note that God takes interest in every aspect of the life of His people particularly in the administration of justice, the right to fair hearing and the need to preserve righteousness in the throne (Proverbs 29:2). He would not leave anything to chance so that His people can have a foretaste of His righteous judgments.

ACCEPTABLE SACRIFICE AND WORSHIP (Deuteronomy 17:1-7; Romans 12:1; 2 Kings 17:36; Exodus 12:5; Leviticus 22:21-25; Numbers 35:30; Hebrews 10:28)

“Thou shalt not sacrifice unto the LORD thy God any bullock, or sheep, wherein is blemish, or any evilfavouredness: for that is an abomination unto the LORD thy God” (Deuteronomy 17:1).

(Romans 12:1). The emphasis is to present ourselves in free and voluntary offering for the service of God. We must offer to God bodies that are holy and separated from the world. Every born again believer is under obligation to be obedient to the teachings of Jesus Christ and live in a manner becoming of God’s saving grace. The true Christian obeys God

because of what He has done for us through Christ. We obey Him because He first loved us and sent His Son to die for us. Closely following the command not to offer unwholesome animals to God is the law against the worship of idols. Those who engage in such were to receive capital punishment.

“If there be found among you, within any of thy gates which the LORD thy God giveth thee, man or woman, that hath wrought wickedness in the sight of the LORD thy God, in transgressing his covenant, And hath gone and served other gods, and worshipped them, either the sun, or moon, or any of the host of heaven, which I have not commanded” (Deuteronomy 17:2,3).

Question 2: *What constitutes idol worship today?*

To ensure that allegations of idolatry were substantiated, the matter had to be diligently looked into, with two or three witnesses confirming the sin. Furthermore, the witnesses who reported the transgression were to cast the first stones at the offender. This procedure was to ensure that the victim indeed committed the offence and that the witnesses affirm what their consciences justify. The same principles had to be applied for every offence that demands witnesses. No conviction of any crime, whether worthy of death or not, should be established without the testimony of at least two witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15; Numbers 35:30).

Question 3: *What lesson can believers learn from the way allegations of idolatry were substantiated in Israel?*

This divine principle would ensure that the victim was not set up by an individual through malice, personal prejudice or hatred in which case the accused is made to suffer unjustly. Second, the veracity of the allegation would be proved if their testimonies did not agree. Third, if there were contradictions, the accused was spared for their inability to prove their case beyond any reasonable doubt. Therefore, believers and leaders in God’s house should ensure that cases of misconduct are examined diligently and dealt with appropriately. God’s word should be used as the standard for dealing with every matter. Our judgment will then be in accord with God’s will. Whenever there is an allegation against any member of the Church, we are to examine the evidence carefully enough to know whether or not a real sin has been committed before we discipline the accused. However, judgment must be carried out in the spirit of love, humility and mercy (Galatians 6:1) knowing that we too shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

ADMINISTRATION AND SYSTEM OF JUSTICE (Deuteronomy 17:8-13; 16:18; 1 Samuel 8:5,19,20; 10:19; Jeremiah 30:21; 2 Kings 11:12; 22:8)

“If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, and between stroke and stroke, being matters of controversy within thy gates: then shalt thou arise, and get thee up into the place which the LORD thy God shall choose” (Deuteronomy 17:8).

The Lord, through Moses, had earlier ordered that courts of judgment be established throughout the land (Deuteronomy 16:18) to hear cases and give judgment. But here, provision is made for appeals in matters that these other courts were unable to handle. In other words, we are introduced to courts of supreme adjudication so that those who were not satisfied with the manner a controversy was handled could appeal to them. In all civil or criminal cases, where there was any doubt or difficulty, the local magistrates were to submit them by reference to the tribunal of the Sanhedrin – the supreme council – which was composed partly of civil and ecclesiastical persons. Their sittings were held in the

neighbourhood of the sanctuary so that in case of emergencies the high priest had to consult God by Urim (Numbers 27:21). The decisions of these courts were binding on the appellant. From their judgment there was no appeal; and if a person were so perverse and refractory as to refuse obedience to their sentences, his conduct, as inconsistent with the maintenance of order and good government was then to be regarded and punished as a capital crime (Deuteronomy 17:12).

We learn here a lesson in fairness in the manner Israel resolved disputes. Secondly, there is due administration of justice among the people that controversies might be determined, matters at variance adjusted, the injured redressed, and the injurious punished. Thirdly is the principle that the government must respect the legal rights that are owed a person according to the law.

As we come to the New Testament, Christ advocates settling disputes among the brethren (Matthew 18:15-17). Besides, where controversies linger, we have leaders and pastors to mediate in such cases (1 Corinthians 6:1-8).

Question 4: Outline procedures for settling disputes among Christians as directed by Jesus Christ.

Moreover, believers are to be peacemakers and advocate peaceful co-existence. We are not to be found as trouble-makers; we should seek peace and pursue it (1 Peter 3:11).

APPOINTMENT OF KINGS LIKE OTHER NATIONS (Deuteronomy 17:14-20; 5:32; Joshua 1:8; Psalm 119:97,98; 2 Kings 11:12)

After explaining the roles of the appointed judges and the people's responsibility to obey, God moved to the matter of human kingship. Before this time, God had been Israel's King (Exodus 15:18; Numbers 23:21). Though God would consent to give them a human king, Israel's king should not be like other monarchs of the day. God essentially decreed that the nation would be a limited constitutional monarchy under His own supreme theocracy. The king would not be dependent on military power and riches. He was exhorted not to entangle the nation in political alliances that would expose Israel to pagan worship. Instead, the future king was exhorted to guide the nation into obedience to God's laws. In commanding that the king should read and govern according to God's law, he would be under obligation to obey God's instructions. He would not be a tyrant, but a king who ruled in accordance with God's revealed will (Deuteronomy 17:18).

If the kings of Israel had a responsibility to read and meditate on the Book of the Law, Christians, as kings in God's Kingdom, have an even greater responsibility to do so by reading, studying and taking heed to the commandments of God's word.

Question 5: What lesson can believers learn from the way kings in Israel carry out their constitutional responsibility?

God lays the standard for appropriate behaviour of Israel's king as radically different from the kings of this world. First, he is to be chosen by God. Second, he should not be a stranger to the commonwealth of Israel as such would be a stranger to the law and customs in God's earthly kingdom. Third, he must not amass wealth for the sake of it in form of gold and silver. Fourth, he must not multiply horses; that is, put his trust and confidence in military hardware in spite of divine promise for their security. Fifth, he is not to take many wives (Deuteronomy 17:17) as these would turn his heart away from the true God as did the wives of Solomon many years later (1 Kings 11:3,4). Sixth, he is to write for himself a copy of the law which he should read all the days of his life so **“that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes,**

to do them" (Deuteronomy 17:19). In summary, Israel's king must carefully avoid everything that would turn him from God and the promotion of godliness in the land. Riches, honours and pleasures are good but sedate the unwise into spiritual numbness and ungodliness. The New Testament calls these the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16). Rather than fall prey, the king must carefully study the law of God and make them his rule. Having a copy of the Scriptures in his own writing, he must read it all the days of his life. Likewise, it is not enough that we have copies of the Bible; we must read them daily and put to practice what we read as long as we live. The king's writing and reading were nothing if he did not practise what he read.

Question 6: How can we apply the instructions that God gave to the kings of Israel to Christians today?

Even though other kings in surrounding nations wielded absolute power over their subjects, the authority of Israel's king was to be circumscribed by the law. The result of heeding God's injunctions for the king and having the Scriptures for a guide is "**that his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment... to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom**" (Deuteronomy 17:20). This humble servant-leadership will be the establishment of an enduring dynasty for the king and his descendants. As believers, our continuance in God's word and abiding faith in Christ remain God's pledge for good success (Joshua 1:8).

Lesson 497

INHERITANCE AND DUTY OF THE PRIESTS

MEMORY VERSE: "The Priests the Levites, and all the tribe of Levi, shall have no part nor inheritance with Israel: they shall eat the offerings of the LORD made by fire, and his inheritance" (Deuteronomy 18:1).

TEXT: Deuteronomy 18:1-14

Having elaborately spelt out the manner of appointment and lifestyle of Israeli kings in the previous chapter, Moses reminded the Israelites of the inheritance and duty of the priests and Levites. By bringing the attention of his listeners back from secular leadership and responsibilities to spiritual matter and focusing it on the priests, Moses demonstrated the high regard God has for spiritual service and servants. The priests were the divinely appointed officials that officiated during worship in the tabernacle by offering various sacrifices on behalf of the nation of Israel and leading the people to confess their sins.

The Levites were responsible for performing other supportive services such as providing music, serving as door keepers and preparing sacrifices for offering by the priests of the tabernacle. Aaron and his sons were the priests while the rest of the sons of Levi were the Levites (Numbers 18:1-7). The Lord attached a great deal of

importance to their welfare and made provision for their offices. The Lord, in our study today, strikes a balance between the benefits and responsibilities of the priests and Levites. They were to enjoy the benefits of inheritance while carrying out their responsibilities. Therefore, we, as believers, must ensure that we do not abandon our responsibilities in the name of running after divine benefits or promises. We must be fully involved in the responsibilities if we hope to reap the full benefits attached. This is because there cannot be benefits without responsibilities.

Question 1: *How do believers enjoy the full benefits of the divine inheritance?*

DIVINE INHERITANCE OF THE PRIESTS (Deuteronomy 18:1-4; Numbers 18:8,12,20,21; 26:62; Exodus 22:29; Leviticus 7:30-34; Matthew 19:28,29; Mark 10:29,30; 1 Corinthians 9:13,14; Malachi 3:10)

The Lord Himself commanded that the priests and the Levites should have no part or inheritance with Israel because He was their inheritance. This provision was made by God to safeguard against the priests' entangling themselves with the affairs of this life bearing in mind the enormity of the work God had committed to them. While they were not to entangle themselves with the affairs of this life, they were also not to be denied any of the comforts and conveniences of this life. The other Israelites were to provide for them. And this was to be done diligently by the people.

The priests' service was a divinely appointed one. As they were appointed to serve God's people, so were they well provided for so they would lack nothing that was necessary for comfortable living. God does not wish that His people should serve Him for nothing. Those engaged in serving the Lord need to know that "**the Lord is their inheritance**" and that He is concerned about their welfare. They were to enjoy the best from the people. "**The firstfruit also of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the first of the fleece of thy sheep, shalt thou give him.**" It is of note that the children of Israel were commanded to bring the first and best of their offering from which the priests and Levites were to have their portion (Deuteronomy 18:4). Apostle Paul made reference to this when he asked the Corinthian church, "**Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the** their dues and starving the church of fund for evangelistic outreaches and project execution. Such people are also indirectly denying themselves of the blessings that could have accrued to them for simply obeying the divine principle of sowing and reaping.

The maintenance of priests was such as left them altogether disentangled from the affairs of this life. They had no land to till, no vineyards to dress, no cattle to tend, no visible estate to take care of, and yet, they lacked nothing that was necessary for living. The Lord did not want them to be distracted by what to eat and drink. The ministry requires full concentration. It is not different today. It is our responsibility as the body of Christ to ensure that we prevent the pursuit of the things of this world from distracting our ministers from the goal of serving the Lord and getting us to heaven.

On the part of the priests and the Levites, they have to bear in mind that the Lord is their part and inheritance. Those who have God for their inheritance and portion have everything and should look at the things of this world with the eye of God. Their minds should not be taken over by the things of this world or by worry and anxiety. "**The Lord is my portion, therefore will I hope in him**" (Lamentation 3:24). Ministers of the gospel should shun greed or worry and anxiety seeing God generously

cares and provides for the welfare of all those enlisted in His service. Rather, they should serve with joy and zeal, knowing that **“God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints and do minister”** (Hebrews 6:10).

THE DUTY OF THE PRIESTS (Deuteronomy 18:5-8; Exodus 28:1; Numbers 3: 6-8,10; Deuteronomy 10:8; 17:12; Numbers 18:1-6; 4:24-27; 2 Chronicles 31:2).

Question 3: *What lesson can believers learn from the great responsibility attached to the privileged position of the priests and Levites?*

The Levites were separated and set apart from the rest of the tribes of Israel by God so that they could render special spiritual service to Him. The place of their service required a high level of commitment and consecration that warranted their utter separation from routine secular obligations of the rest children of Israel. This was to avoid possible distraction and enhance their concentration on their primary assignment.

Aaron and his sons constituted the priesthood; they had an oversight function over the services of the sanctuary. Their duty was to bear the iniquity of the priesthood and of the people, and the Levites were to assist them to take care of everything about the tabernacle. Though they had a high and important office conferred on them by divine design, it was a position of great responsibility, diligent care and profound consecration. Leaders and workers in the house of God should know that their calling is a privilege which demands that they serve God with steadfast commitment and diligence.

God demands holiness of all who bear His vessels. They owed it a duty to be free from iniquity. The priesthood and their supportive ministers were expected to maintain a higher level of holiness and righteousness more than the people they were to be ministering to. It was the duty of the priests and the Levites to serve God wholeheartedly as there was no room for half-hearted service or a place for ease in the service. Neither the priests nor the Levites could have their own way or carry on as if there were no rules for service. It was the duty of the priests and Levites to ensure that holiness was maintained and the people were directed in the way of the Lord. They were to represent God.

In the same vein, ministers of the gospel must bear in mind that their services far outweigh secular or temporal services that may be available in the land. On no account should they compare themselves or compete with political leaders or captains of industries because there is no basis for comparison between them. The business of leading people to heaven is an enormous one which should not be compromised. In fact, considering their high level of service God has called them into, it is befitting for them to serve with commensurate level of commitment and devotion.

In His wisdom, God has bestowed on His children different degrees of gifts and talents and He requires that we put them to His diligent use. He expects us to serve and remain faithful wherever He has put us, taking heed that we are not found wanting at our duty posts because we are busy with activities that He has not assigned to us. We must be faithful to the divine responsibilities that God has committed into our trusts.

One great lesson from the duties of the priests and the Levites is that the privileged positions of ministers in the house of God go with great responsibility of ensuring that the sanctity of the house of God and His altar is preserved. The shepherds of the flock

of Christ are answerable for their state at any time. This calls for fear and trembling. Another lesson is that we must know the limits and the boundaries of our ministries and avoid rivalry, contentions and competition. **“And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully”** (2 Timothy 2:5).

Yet another lesson is that, the service of the priests and the Levites to the children of Israel is a prototype of Christ’s ministry to the whole world. The Israelites could not approach directly to the sanctuary; neither could they offer their sacrifices by themselves. In the same vein, we cannot come to God directly on our own merit except through the substitutionary work of Christ. He says, **“I am the way, the truth and the life; no one cometh unto the Father, but by me”** (John 14:6). For any sinner to be accepted by God, he must come through Christ by way of repentance from sin and faith in His sacrifice. Finally, God demands holiness of all who bear His vessels; and as such, they must be pure.

DENOUNCED PRACTICES OF THE HEATHEN (Deuteronomy 18:9-14; 12:29,31; Leviticus 18:21,24; 19:26; Isaiah 8:19; 1 Samuel 28:7; Genesis 17:1; Matthew 5:48; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

After giving specific instructions concerning the priests, Moses beamed the searchlight of divine imperatives on the generality of the Israelites: **“When thou art come into the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations”** (Verse 9). He went further to categorize those abominations of the inhabitants of the land which the Israelites were to abstain from. How ministers and preachers need to borrow a leaf from this to ensure their sermons and exhortations are unambiguous as much as possible and applicable to all categories of people in their congregations!

Question 4: What should be a believer’s attitude to the abominable practices of unbelievers?

One of the practices Moses told the congregation to abstain from was occultism. Involvement in occult practices or occultism is a great affront to the supremacy of God and a challenge to His sovereignty. It entails recognition of a rival deity besides the true God. Consulting with familiar spirits and involvement in witchcraft is a grievous sin in the sight of God. It is spiritual adultery and giving God’s honour to the devil. Many people get involved in these practices unawares when they go to those who use diabolical means to get information about themselves or others. Other practices that border on this devilish practice include use of talisman, crystal ball, tarot cards, consulting horoscopes, astrologers, taking part in séances, astral projection, fortune telling, clairvoyance, palmistry, star gazing, palm reading, prognostication, Ouija boards, etc.

Believers must avoid these and several other traditional practices that link people with Satan and his kingdom. Those who are in the practice must **“come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and my daughters, saith the Lord Almighty”** (2 Corinthians 6:17,18).

Question 5: How can one become perfect?

As God demanded perfection from the Israelites so He does from believers in all ages. The subject of perfection is so important that it runs through the scriptures. Believers are called to be perfect. To be perfect is to be holy in thoughts, words and actions. It is to be free from the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21) and manifest the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-24). Holiness is the nature of God and His command to be holy is strongly binding on all Christians. To ensure that His command is fulfilled, He made adequate provision for it by giving His Son, Jesus Christ as an offering to set free from outward and inward sins. As such, perfection is possible by faith for as many as will come to the Lord for the experience.

Lesson 498

THE PROMISE OF THE MESSIAH

MEMORY VERSE: “**The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken**” (Deuteronomy 18:15).

EXT: Deuteronomy 18:15-22

God had, in the preceding verses of this chapter, warned the children of Israel against the heathen practices of sorceries, incantations, divinations, soothsaying, observing of times, witchcraft, wizardry, necromancy and consulting with familiar spirits (Deuteronomy 18:9-14). Rather than seek knowledge through these abominable and idolatrous ways, God promised to give His people a prophet that will instruct, direct and warn them. This promise became necessary so as not to leave His people in the dark as to how to inquire and know His way which is completely different from that of the world. Every believer needs to learn that there are things God hates and has prohibited in scriptures as well as things He loves and enjoins His children to do. Moses revealed that the Israelites would not need to consult with familiar spirits and soothsayers to know the will and word of God as agents of Satan do not know His mind and can never be His mouthpiece. God is the One who appoints ministers through whom He speaks to His people.

Question 1: *Who is the promised prophet?*

Though God sent other prophets after Moses, none of them fits into the mould of criteria of the promised Prophet. After the ministry of Moses, the scripture affirms that none of God’s prophets that arose was like unto him. Thus, this promise can only be applied to Christ, the Messiah (Acts 3:22; Acts 7:37). It is also striking to note that the requisite obedience to the promised prophet in our text was also reiterated by God concerning Christ in the New Testament as we shall see in this study. Obviously, Christ’s words and teachings are infallible, final and authentic; and as such, must be received and obeyed to avoid the displeasure and condemnation from God (Psalm 2:12).

CHRIST: THE PROMISED PROPHET (Deuteronomy 18:15-18; Exodus 20:18,19; Genesis 3:15; John 1:21,25,45; 6:14,40; Acts 3:22-26; 7:37)

Question 2: *Explain the reason for the incarnation of the Messiah.*

The promise of a prophet that would speak the mind of God to the children of Israel was born out of need and request for it at the time of Moses. In Horeb, the Lord descended on Mount Sinai with thunders, lightning and frightening wonders to speak to the children of Israel (Exodus 20:18,19). Though Moses communed with God on the mount and received the ten commandments for the people, their request was to be answered in God's own way.

Moses, the divine mouthpiece to the people at that time clarified that it was **“According to all that thou desiredst of the LORD thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not. And the LORD said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken. I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him”** (Deuteronomy 18:16-18). Thus, Jesus Christ incarnated as a man (John 1:14) in great condescension to reveal God to man. This is a mystery which the rational man continues to stumble at for failing to exercise faith in the wisdom and provision of God so as to enjoy the redemptive benefits accruing therefrom. Not accepting the divinity and incarnation of Christ, many people exclude themselves from the salvation He procured for us through His sacrifice as Saviour, and not just as a Prophet.

Question 3: *What are the similarities between the life and ministry of Moses and that of Christ?*

Christ is the only prophet who is parallel to Moses. For it is written, **“there arose not a prophet in Israel like unto Moses whom the Lord knew face to face in all the signs and wonders which the Lord sent him to do”** (Deuteronomy 34:10,11). Both Moses and Christ have (1) mediatory, prophetic and priestly office (2) peculiar excellence of ministry (John 15:24); (3) variety and magnitude of miracles: they were acknowledged as prophets mighty in deed and words before God and all the people (Luke 24:19; Acts 7:22); (4) closeness and familiar communion with God (5) a great following as great leaders of the people of God (6) new dispensation of religion – Judaism and Christianity – they kick-started. (7) given laws of God by which men then and now should live. Moses was a divine instrument used by God in giving the Law; the Pentateuch. The Pentateuch as part of the Jewish canon has ever been acknowledged as authentic and divinely inspired books that are fundamental to Jewish religion. Setting aside the ceremonial law, Christ gave new commandments in the gospels and Acts of the Apostles on which the Christian church is founded. All genuine Christians are governed both in heart and life by the contents of the moral law given by Moses and new commandments given by Christ.

It is therefore not surprising that fifteen hundred years after the prediction of the promised prophet like unto Moses, Apostle Peter under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit expressly applied the promise to Christ. **“For Moses truly said unto the father, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever it shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass that every soul which will not hear that prophet shall be destroyed from among the people”** (Acts 3:22,23). Stephen also affirmed this truth (Acts 7:22).

But as a Lawgiver, Christ excelled Moses. He is the One **“of whom Moses in the Law and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth the Son of God”**. Christ is

therefore undoubtedly the anti-type of Moses in the Old Testament as prophet, legislator, mediator and the head of the people of God.

Question 4: How is Jesus superior to Moses?

Although Jesus fits favourably as the anti-type of Moses both in life and ministry, He is however superior to and greater than Moses. There abound clear scriptural evidences of Christ's superiority to Moses. (1) Though Moses fulfilled the ministry of mediation between God and His people (Deuteronomy 5:5; Exodus 20:18-20; 33:1-23), Jesus is greater than Moses (Hebrews 8:6) because He is not only the Mediator of a better covenant established on better promises, but He is also the Saviour of all human races. He saves from the power, guilt and consequences of sin that no one else could do (Matthew 1:21). (2) Moses was accredited to have excelled all other prophets in speaking to God mouth to mouth (Numbers 12:6-8) but Christ excelled him and all men in being from the bosom of the Father (John 1:18; 3:13). (3) While Moses was a faithful servant in God's house, Christ is a faithful Son over His own house (Hebrews 3:2, 5, 6). (4) In terms of the magnitude of miracles performed, Moses could not equal Christ as he never raised the dead to life. (5) Moses spoke the word of God but Christ is the Word personified. (6) The conception and birth of Moses was natural, His was supernatural, born of virgin Mary. (7) Moses was a creature who inherited the nature of sin but Christ is the sinless Creator of the universe.

CHRIST: A PROPHET TO BE HEARD AND OBEYED (Deuteronomy 18:18,19; Matthew 21:1-11,46; Luke 7:11-16; 24:19; John 6:14; 9:17; 13:31-33; John 4:19;12:46-50; 7:16; 6:14; Acts 7:37; 3:22,23)

The run of events during Christ ministry revealed that the people understood He was the promised Prophet and Messiah. To the enquiry of the inhabitants of Jerusalem at Christ's Triumphal entry, **"the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee"**. In the city of Nain for instance, where an only Son of a widow died. Jesus comforted her saying, **"weep not"** and raised her son to life. Then, **"there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people"**. The huge impact of His ministry on the lives of the people could prove no other point in their perception other than **"this is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world"** (John 6:14). Christ's ministry drew the ire of king Herod who had earlier killed John. When the Pharisees threatened that He should flee from town to avoid being killed by Herod, Christ affirmed that He was a Prophet; and that He would continue His ministry, **"for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem"**. On her part, the Samaritan woman, overawed by Christ's knowledge and revelation of her past lifestyle said, **"Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet"**. Apart from His kingly triumphal entry into Jerusalem, impact of His miracles, His personal testimony, supernatural knowledge and revelation, the truth and power of His doctrines cleared whatever lingering doubt that existed in the minds of some skeptics about His identity as the expected prophet. **"Many of the people therefore, when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the Prophet."** Aside being a Prophet, Christ's other titles include the Son of God, Saviour of the world, the Word of God, Lord of lords, King of kings, etc.

The implication of Christ as the promised Prophet is that He would be the patent mouthpiece of God as contained in the original promise. Incidentally, Christ declared, **"my doctrine is not mine but his that sent me"** (John 7:16). In His eternal wisdom and mercy, **"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past**

unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds” (Hebrews 1:1,2). Jesus Christ is therefore the eternal Word from God. To believe that Christ is a Prophet is right but to fail to do what He says is judgemental.

Question 5: *What is the implication of rejecting Jesus and His offer of salvation?*

Acceptance of and obedience to this great Prophet is obligatory (Deuteronomy 18:19). This command to obey Him was reiterated on the Mount of Transfiguration when God said, **“This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him”** (Matthew 17:5). The implication is that, all the words, teachings and commandments of Christ are immutable and superior to any human opinions or philosophies. God requires obedience to all His teachings on the full inspiration of God’s word, trinity of the Godhead, virgin birth, total sinfulness of all men, repentance, restitution, justification, water baptism, the Lord’s Supper, entire Sanctification, Holy Ghost baptism, healing and health, personal evangelism, monogamy, readiness for His second coming, etc. There is therefore no option to total obedience to Christ words. If those who disobeyed and rebelled against Moses were severely punished (Numbers 16:1-31; 12:1-10) everyone who neglects the offer salvation by the Lord will be punished.

Rejecting Christ and His words is rejecting the only divinely approved access and way to the Father (John 14:6). And since Christ said, **“the words that I speak they are spirit and life”**, it would also mean rejecting the life of God that comes through His words. Christ is the only Deliverer from the bondage of sin. Redemption and eternal life would be a mirage without Him. Besides, Christ’s words would be the yardstick and instrument of judgment of backsliders, sceptics, atheists, false prophets and teachers who either toy with or reject them outright.

CAUTION AGAINST FALSE PROPHETS (Deuteronomy 18:20-22; Jeremiah 23:25 –32; Ezekiel 13:6-10; 1 Kings 22: 16-23; Matthew 24:11; 1 John 4:1; Isaiah 8:20; 12:46-50).

The promise of a Prophet like unto Moses undoubtedly implied the institution of prophecy and the order of prophets who would speak the true word of God to the people. This institution of prophets obligates the nation of Israel to obey the word of Jehovah and also to distinguish it from the words of men. Thus, any counterfeit claim or commission from the true God was to be adjudged the highest treason against the crown and dignity of the King of kings. Hence, such sacrilege and profanity was punishable by death after trial by the Sanhedrin.

Question 6: *What should be the believer’s attitude towards false prophets and prophecy today?*

In the same vein, the issue of false prophets should not be taken lightly in the church today. We must beware of self-appointed prophets who parade themselves in prayer houses, churches and ministries today. They are characteristically hypocrites, liars, deceivers, pretenders, peddlers of false doctrines using the Bible and religion as a cover up. Their aim is to sway people from serving the true God.

Due to the gravity of the offence of being misled and or misleading other people away from the true God, it was needful for Him to spell out the marks of true or false

prophecy. **“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”** (Deuteronomy 18: 20).

Question 7: What are the criteria for assessing biblical ministries and ministers?

It is interesting to note here that the assessment of true servants of God was not to be based on titles, magnitude of miracles or charisma, but simply on faithfulness to the word of God. Any ministry, church or minister whose teachings and doctrines are not based on the uniform teaching of God’s word should be regarded as false. It is clear from His word that (i) whatever is directly against the plain meaning of the written word; (ii) teaching, practice or conduct that encourages sin or opposes holy living (Jeremiah 8:9); (iii) knowledge or revelation, visions or dreams allegedly gained that contradict the inspired truth in the 66 books of the Bible (Isaiah 8:20); (iv) unfulfilled predictions that was given in the name of the Lord; (v) insinuation of a form of worship that is aimed at turning the people of God away from the true and living God (Isaiah 8:19); (vi) guidance or ministration under the influence of familiar spirits; (vii) giving of false hope and security to sinners and backslidden people, are all to be adjudged false.

Self acclaimed prophets of our days who presumptuously and deliberately lead people astray with unscriptural revelations need to desist and repent of their evil deeds before judgment falls. This is because false prophecy is a terrible abomination as it is contemptible to God.

Christ warns that many false prophets would arise as part of the evils that will characterise the end of the world. As forerunners of the antichrist, they would seek to deceive Christians and turn them away from the faith. The believer’s attitude to false prophets and teachings therefore is to avoid them, reject their teaching, and resist them through preaching of the truth of the gospel. Believers must remain under the anointed teaching of God-appointed ministers of the gospel and be faithful to God by earnestly contending for the faith once delivered unto the saints till the end.

Lesson 499

CITIES OF REFUGE

MEMORY VERSE: “Thou shalt prepare thee a way, and divide the coasts of thy land, which the LORD thy God giveth thee to inherit, into three parts, that every slayer may flee thither” (Deuteronomy 19:3).

TEXT: Deuteronomy 19:1-21

The thrust of our previous lesson was on God’s promise of the Messiah who was to be His mouth-piece to reveal His mind to His people. The benefit of salvation to be enjoyed through Christ, the promised Prophet who is also the Saviour is what the establishment of the cities of refuge we are considering today foreshadowed.

Obviously, God bestows great value on human life and rights. He treasures life so much that He made ample provisions for its protection, preservation and maximum safety. It was one of the precepts given to the sons of Noah that **“whoso sheddeth**

man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed" (Genesis 9:6). Here, we have the law settled between the blood of the murdered and the blood of the murderer, and with regards to certain precautions necessary to avert miscarriage of justice. The cities of refuge were meant to give temporal coverage to whoever accidentally killed a fellow human being until the case is determined by the judges. This is necessary as God does not want the death of innocent souls.

Question 1: *What is the value of a soul in the light of the provision of cities of refuge?*

If the Lord places such great value on physical life, what greater value He has put on the spiritual life of man!

"For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26). Knowing that human soul is designed to live eternally, care must be taken to ensure that our brief moment on earth does not jeopardize our eternal rest with God.

Furthermore, statutes that protected landed properties and forestalled false witnessing were re-emphasized by Moses in this study. The law forbade the removal of old landmarks and one witness rising up against a man for any iniquity or sin he has committed (Deuteronomy 19:14,15). This command tallies with Christ's injunction that **"...all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets"** (Matthew 7:12). As we relate with one another as brethren in the household of faith there should be regard for one another's right, and care must be taken never to betray the mutual confidence that rules among us.

THE MEANING AND ESSENCE OF THE CITIES OF REFUGE (Deuteronomy 19:1,2,4-13; Exodus 21:13; Numbers 35:9-34; Deuteronomy 4:41-43; Joshua 20:1-9).

"When the LORD thy God hath cut off the nations, whose land the LORD thy God giveth thee, and thou succeedest them, and dwellest in their cities, and in their houses" (Deuteronomy 19:1). God who owns the universe cast out the Canaanites out of their land and gave it as a possession to Abraham and his descendants because their cup of iniquity was full. These nations had greatly polluted the land through abominations; therefore, they were driven out. The holy nature of God is always opposed to evil no matter the status of the perpetrators.

Question 2: *Explain the concept of the cities of refuge and its applications to believers today.*

The Levites had no inheritance among the children of Israel when the land was divided; the Lord was their inheritance. Out of the lands or cities apportioned to other tribes, they were to give portions to the Levites who, in turn, were to set aside six cities as cities of refuge. Three cities were to be separated on this side of Jordan because they were yet to cross River Jordan: **"Thou shalt separate three cities for thee in the midst of thy land, which the LORD thy God giveth thee to possess it"** (Deuteronomy 19: 2). Three more cities were to be added later if they obeyed the Lord and got more lands across the Jordan River (Deuteronomy 19:9). The promises of God are sure on conditions that we keep His commandments and do them.

God provided the cities of refuge in order to protect the inadvertent or accidental slayer. In such cases, the manslayer should not suffer the fate of a murderer; he could flee to the nearest place of refuge and remained there until his case was determined by the judges. If he got to the city of refuge before the avenger of blood, he is safe. If he was found to be innocent, he would remain there until the death of the High Priest but if otherwise, he would be handed over to the avenger of blood to die for his crime.

The cities of refuge foreshadowed the refuge which sinners, fleeing from the wrath to come can find only in Jesus Christ. He is near whosoever shall call upon His name. Those who run to Christ, by confessing their sins and turning away from them shall be saved from God's judgment. Their guilt will be taken away and they will be free to enjoy the bounties of God's provisions.

Life is precious and must be protected. Our lifestyle should give the highest regards for human life. Business and factory owners, health workers or those governing human affairs should be careful not to be guilty of human blood through neglect of safety measures and precautions. We should guard against anything that would constitute hazards to human life so as not to be guilty before God. Countless lives would be saved if such precautions are taken.

The imminence of death is underscored here by the allusion to its sudden and accidental occurrence through the flying off of the axe-head. Here we see how life lies exposed daily to fatalities and the need therefore to be always ready. A blood washed believer overtaken by such precarious occurrence instantly finds himself in the bosom of Christ while sinners, backsliders, hypocrites and careless believers would find to their utmost dismay the horrors of hell. Let us watch and be sober and tread the path of righteousness so that we may meet our Lord when He comes.

Christ is our refuge (John 3:14-16; Ephesians 2:1-9; Hebrews 6:18; Matthew 11:28-30). He died to pay our debt of sin (Isaiah 53:1-6).

Security in the cities of refuge is conditioned upon the blamelessness of the slayer who remains in the city until the death of the High Priest. In like manner, there is need for all who have taken refuge in Christ to constantly abide in Him, work out their salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12), avoid anything that displeases Him, and keep His commandments always.

ESCAPE AND PATHWAY TO THE CITIES OF REFUGE (Deuteronomy 19:3,6; Numbers 35:25-28; Joshua 20:4-6; Isaiah 62:10-12; 30:21; 42:16; 40:4; 45:2; 35:8; Jeremiah 31:21; Proverbs 16:17)

“Thou shalt prepare thee a way, and divide the coasts of thy land, which the LORD thy God giveth thee to inherit, into three parts, that every slayer may flee thither” (Deuteronomy 19:3). It was the duty of the elders of Israel to prepare roads to each city of refuge, keep and ensure their regular maintenance so that the manslayer might not have any obstruction in his flight. The roads were to be wide enough, bridges were to be constructed over all rivers and proper signs put up at crossroads to aid the suspect to escape from the avenger of blood. The country was to be divided into three districts and the city of refuge located as closely as possible for all the people in the land.

Question 3: *How can we clear the way of salvation and make it straight and easily accessible for sinners?*

“And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them” (Isaiah 42:16). Christ is winsome and His servants should not mislead the seekers and sinners by their actions and lifestyle. He came as a Lamb, gentle, meek and lowly. He is full of love and good works and when He suffered, He did not retaliate. Instead, He prayed for His persecutors and healed them. He is the **Advocate** of the accused, the **Bright and Morning Star**, **Christ**, **Counsellor** and **Comforter**, the **Door** and the **Deliverer**, **Emmanuel**, the Most **Excellent**, **Friend** of sinners, the **Good Shepherd**, our Great **High Priest**, **Judge** of the whole earth, **Jesus**, **King** of kings, **Lamb** of God that takes away the sin of the whole world, the **Lover** of our Soul, **Lilly** of the valley, the only **Mediator** between God and man, Our **Messiah**, His **Name** is above all names, the **Only** begotten of the Father, Blessed **Physician** by whose stripes we are healed, He who **Quickened** whom He will, **Rock** of Ages and the **Rose** of Sharon, **Saviour** and **Sanctifier**, **Teacher** who comes from God, **Unsearchable** riches of heaven, the **Victorious Conqueror** of all our adversaries, the True **Vine**, **Xpress** Image of God the Father, His **Yoke** is easy to bear and His **Zeal** will bring to pass all His promises in our lives.

Question 4: What is the consequence of neglecting the provision of the cities of refuge by the manslayer; and what is the consequence of neglecting the provision for our salvation today?

If the manslayer lingers on the way to the city of refuge, the avenger of blood will catch up with him and he will be killed. The same danger of sudden destruction awaits those that delay or postpone their salvation. Now is the acceptable time and today is the day of salvation. **“How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him?”** (Hebrews 2:3). Hell is real; judgment is coming, sinners should escape for their life before it is too late (Isaiah 55:7). Believers who are already on the escape route should guard against the temptation of looking back. They should **“...lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us”** (Hebrews 12:1).

ESTABLISHING PEACEFUL AND CHRISTLIKE HUMAN RELATIONSHIP (Deuteronomy 19:14; Job 24:2-4; Proverbs 22:28; 23:10; Hosea 5:10; Galatians 5:6,14,22; Matthew 7:12; Numbers 35:30; Deuteronomy 17:6; Exodus 20:16; 23:1; Proverbs 19:9; 24:28; 25:18; Matthew 19:1)

“Thou shalt not remove thy neighbour’s landmark, which they of old time have set in thine inheritance, which thou shalt inherit in the land that the LORD thy God giveth thee to possess it” (Deuteronomy 19:14). Before the extensive use of fences, landed property was marked out by stones or posts, set up to ascertain the divisions of family estates. It was easy to remove one of these landmarks and set it in a different place. Hence, it was a matter of considerable importance to prevent this crime among the Israelites since removing them would be equivalent to forgery, theft, altering or concealing the title-deeds of others. Accordingly, the Mosaic law not only prohibited it but attached a particular curse to it (Deuteronomy 27:17). Here we see God’s laws that protect men’s properties and prevent the crime of perjury. Disregard for God’s law of peaceful co-existence and being content with what we have are causes

of wars and fighting among men. We should be content with what we have and not give room for envy, jealousy or covetousness. We are to respect people's rights even if they do not have the power to fight for it. The great Defender of the defenceless will surely requite whosoever defrauds his neighbours of their rights.

Question 5: State the New Testament rule that safeguards us against the crime of fraud and perjury.

All the laws and the prophets hang on love (Matthew 22:37-40). Our Lord Jesus Christ summarizes this in what is popularly known as the Golden Rule: **"Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets"** (Matthew 7:12). If we would not like to have our right trampled upon, we must not do the same to others.

FALSE WITNESSING AND ITS CONSEQUENCES (Deuteronomy 19:15-21; Numbers 35:30; Deuteronomy 17:6; 1 Kings 21:1-16; Matthew 26:57-62; Acts 6:11-14; 24:1-9)

"One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established" (Deuteronomy 19:15). A single witness is not enough to establish a fact of crime against his fellow since extra care is needed before a suspect is declared guilty and punished. Even though it is possible for men to conspire to bear false witness against another (as in the cases of Naboth, our Lord Jesus Christ, Stephen and Paul the Apostle), God had put in place what we need to run a just and equitable society.

To testify in a case is not sinful but must be done with sincere motive and fear of God. Those who device spurious charges against their neighbours for vengeance or to have unjust gains, risk divine wrath. However, evil men are not to be covered, whoever they are. The son of an Israelitish woman, whose father was an Egyptian, was promptly reported to Moses when he blasphemed the name of the Lord, and cursed; He was stoned to death by the congregation according to the word of the Lord (Leviticus 24:10-16). The congregation that covers the sins of its members does so at the expense of the presence and power of God.

The justice of our perfect God stipulates here that diligent inquisition be made when a case of false witness is observed and if the witness is confirmed to be false, the false accuser should be made to suffer the exact punishment he intended for his victim. As it is painful to be sentenced for an offence not committed, so much more is it to vindicate a criminal and let him go free. In most cases, if we allow God, He will reveal clearly the truth concerning any matter (Leviticus 24:12-14). God also warns against sentiments in executing this law to serve as deterrents for others who will hear and avoid such evil practices. The exact punishment that he intended for the one being falsely accused should be given to him. **"And thine eye shall not pity but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot"** (Deuteronomy 19:21).

Question 6: What is the danger in the sin of perjury?

God forbids lying in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:16). An expanded form of this command is found in Exodus 23:1,2; Proverbs 19:9; 24:28; 25:18.

When men allow Satan to build up malice, hatred and anger in their hearts against their fellow human beings, they go to any length to crucify their victims. If you are guilty of this evil, you can call on God for pardon today before it is too late. God is graciously waiting to receive every repentant sinner. **“Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?”** (Ezekiel 33:11,14-16).

Lesson 500

PAUL TAKES THE GOSPEL TO CORINTH

MEMORY VERSE: “And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the Spirit and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ” (Acts 18:4,5).

TEXT: Acts 18:1-23

In the preceding chapter, Paul’s sermon at Mars’ Hill yielded little results among the Athenians. Some of the Athenians doubted and mocked while others put off their decision for the salvation of their souls to another day. Though few men and women were converted, the negative response of other Athenians to the gospel did not affect His loyalty to the Lord. He proceeded to Corinth to fulfill the great commission. His attitude is a great lesson to all contemporary evangelists. Our duty is to preach the word. The Lord had told the church that there would be diverse responses to the gospel message (Matthew 13:3-23). So, it is not a surprise that even at the closing chapter of the book of Acts, some hearers of the gospel **“believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not”** (Acts 28:24).

Corinth, one of the most populous and chief commercial cities of Greece, was the seat of splendor, show and corruption. No city of ancient times was more profligate. In it was located the temple and statute of the Greek goddess of love (Astarte) whose worship promoted immorality among the citizens and travelers. Despite all the disadvantages, Paul raised a church in Corinth to which he wrote two immortal epistles.

At Corinth, Paul did not mingle himself with the prevalent corrupt practices, but quickly worked with a Jewish couple, Aquila and Priscilla who were of the same trade as himself. As his usual practice, he preached the word of God to the Jews, who opposed the doctrines and blasphemed. In the midst of opposition in Corinth, Paul was greatly encouraged by the Lord: **“Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city”** (Acts 18:9,10).

Question 1: Give reasons why the preaching of the gospel always encounters oppositions.

The preaching of the gospel usually encounters oppositions because Satan and his cohorts want to hinder the salvation of men, discourage preachers of the gospel,

encourage the spread of falsehood and prevent the accomplishment of God's will on earth.

THE PRACTICE OF SELF-SUPPORT IN MINISTRY (Acts 18:1-6; 20:33,34; 1 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-11; 3 John 7; 1 Corinthians 9:13-15)

Paul left Athens for the city of Corinth, where he stayed with a couple, Aquila and Priscilla, who were believers and his professional colleagues in tent-making. As a minister of the gospel, he was entitled to maintenance from the churches he had planted, yet he labored to meet his daily needs. He chose to forego his entitlement of being maintained by the churches lest the ministry be hindered or reproached. This goes to show the stuff he was made of as a true minister. True ministers of the gospel do not in any form seek their own profit, but that of the ministry. They are willing to put the profit of the ministry ahead of their personal rights, profits or convenience in order not to hinder the course of the gospel. His lifestyle was a demonstration of Christ-like humility. He was so humble because he had learnt from his Master who **"came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and give his life a ransom for many"** (Matthew 20:28). His lifestyle is worth emulating.

Question 2: *What lessons can believers learn from Paul's attitude to his daily needs?*

Paul's attitude to his material needs teaches that ministers of the gospel should be ready to support themselves as much as possible. This is necessary to avoid feeling disappointed and hurt when help from others is delayed or not forthcoming. It also teaches ministers to humbly follow the footsteps of older ministers who took such initiative. It also teaches that ministers of the gospel in the same situation as Apostle Paul should seek how to support themselves legally until when the young church is able to take care of their needs and not hide under the pretext of laboring in the Kingdom of God and bringing reproach to the name of the Lord.

Question 3: *What are the responsibilities of the congregations to their ministers in their daily needs?*

However, it is the duty of every Christian congregation to take care of the needs of their ministers. It is wrong for them to allow their local ministers and their families to labour unaided just because Paul, the apostle was not burdensome to his congregations. The scripture affirms that **"they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar. Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel"** (1 Corinthians 9:13,14).

While in Corinth, Paul went to the synagogue of the Jews and preached the whole counsel of God. His craft was merely to meet his material needs and not a substitute for the work of the ministry. He would, however, not allow the tent-making job to replace the major work of soul-winning. Ministers of the gospel should be as watchful and wise to maintain a balance between the two.

At the instance of Silas and Timothy coming from Macedonia, Paul felt compelled in the spirit to preach the word to the Jews and he declared to them that Jesus was the Messiah they had been waiting for. But when they opposed the gospel **"he shook his garment"** (Acts 18:6), signifying that he would refrain from them seeing that they have rejected God's saving grace. Paul still preached to the Jews at Corinth but outside

their synagogue. Rejection of the gospel in one community should always be a cause to move to another.

THE PROMISE OF DIVINE PRESENCE FOR FAITHFUL MINISTERS (Acts 18:7-17; Matthew 28:20; Genesis 28:15; Exodus 33:14; Isaiah 43:2-4; Psalm 91:1-16; Psalm 66:10-12; Psalm 23:4; Isaiah 41:10)

The opposition of the Jews left Paul with no other option than to go to the Gentile nations. Since the Jews would not allow them the use of the synagogue as a safe place of worship, the house of Justus became available alternative for meeting with those who were willing to receive the gospel message. Justus, a Gentile Christian, surrendered his apartment for Christian gathering without any reservation and restriction. What a lesson to all sincere Christians! Those who have made Jesus their Saviour and Lord should submit their earthly possession for use by the Lord!

The fruit of Paul's labour both among the Jews and Gentiles soon manifest as Crispus, an eminent Jew, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord Jesus, with his entire house and was personally baptized by Paul (1 Corinthians 1:14). The conversion of such a man of high status must have greatly further the progress of the Christian faith among the Corinthians. Many of the Corinthians, who were Gentiles, hearing also believed, and were baptized.

Question 4: *What should be the attitude of a faithful minister of the gospel to trials?*

Paul was encouraged by a vision to go on with his work at Corinth. **“Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city”** (Acts 18:9,10). This promise of divine presence and protection renewed Paul's courage to preach the gospel though the people were very outrageous. **“Be not afraid”** of the magistrates of the city, for they have no power against you more than what is given them from above. **“Be not afraid”** of their words, nor dismayed at their looks; but speak; let no opportunity of speaking to them slip; cry aloud, spare not. Christ's assurance to Paul of His presence with him was sufficient to encourage him to do more. Encouraged by God, Paul moved out with fresh vigour, preached eighteen months at Corinth and built one of the largest and most wonderfully gifted churches during his ministry.

Question 5: *What can we learn from the prospect of success the Lord granted Paul in a city like Corinth?*

We learn from the success of Paul in a city like Corinth that seemed to be a centre of immorality that Christian servants should not despair concerning any place of gospel assignment. Christ has **“much people”** there to be won to Him. He created the world and knows it better than anyone else. Ministers and soul-winners should know that the gospel is God's pill for the sin-sick world. No matter the depth of depravity a people might have descended, if they hear the gospel and believe in Christ as Saviour, they will receive **“power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name”** (John 1:12).

The trial of Paul before Gallio is really notable. When Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue got converted, Sosthenes succeeded him and was enthusiastic towards exterminating the so-called Pauline heresy out of the synagogue. Consequently, he resolved to prosecute Paul before the civil tribunal and drive him out of the country. He arrested and arraigned him at the tribunal of Gallio, the Roman proconsul. Gallio, a Roman, who did not care for the Jewish religion, took the case a mere superstition and dismissed it. The animosity of the Gentile multitude is thus aroused against the Jews, who have thus failed in their efforts to get Paul flogged. So, they seize Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat.

The Lord is always faithful to His promises. No matter the challenges and the opposition that comes our way as we preach the gospel, the Lord is able to deliver us.

PAUL'S STEADFAST COMMITMENT TO THE GREAT COMMISSION (Acts 18:18-23; 1 Corinthians 9:20,21; Mark 16:15-18; Matthew 28:18-20)

Despite the opposition in the city of Corinth, Paul tarried a while before leaving for Syria. That Paul “**took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila**” teaches ministers to always have a plan of action on how to evangelise their communities.

Question 6: *What challenge can we receive from Paul's commitment to the great commission?*

Paul's ministry to the Jews continued as he reasoned with them at Ephesus. His steadfastness paid off in Ephesus as the Jews who were eager to know more desired him to tarry with them. Believers should not be discouraged over apparent lack of desired result in the field of evangelism as the Spirit exhorted us to be “**steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord**” (1 Corinthians 15:58).

From Ephesus, he left for Caesera before proceeding to the church at Jerusalem, which is referred to as “**the Church**” because it was the mother church. His trip to Antioch marked the end of Paul's second missionary journey. He later departed from Antioch and visited the brethren in Asia minor - Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening and encouraging them to continue in the faith. Many villages, towns, cities and nations our obedient response to the great commission as Paul obeyed.

Lesson 501

AQUILA AND PRISCILLA

MEMORY VERSE: “**And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly**” (Acts 18:26).

TEXT: Acts 18:24-28

Our study this week beams light on a Christian couple, Aquila and Priscilla. Though they are minor characters that can be grouped with ministers who did not perform great miracles, signs and wonders, their efforts in the gospel work is worth emulating by Christian couples today. Much was not written about them compared to Apostle Paul whose record of exploits, some of which we have studied previously occupies a large portion of the New Testament. Believers tend to celebrate successful public ministers while they neglect those secret and quiet ones who have, through their silent background ministries of teaching, mentoring, counselling and helps raised many successful public preachers.

Though marriage was instituted by God, tying the nuptial knot brings with it added responsibilities and peculiar challenges. The way Aquila and Priscilla were able to manage family responsibilities with work and also fulfil their ministry present great lessons many a Christian couple need to learn in this study. This is in view of the fact that once married, some Christian couples give reasons why they can no longer serve God. Addressing such ugly situation in Corinth, Apostle Paul said, “**...brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none... for the fashion of this world passeth away**” (1 Corinthians 7:29,31). The lives and ministry of Aquila and Priscilla illustrate the kind of consecration, commitment and involvement in gospel work God expects of Christian couples today.

LIFESTYLE AND SERVICE OF A GODLY COUPLE (Acts 18:24-26,1-3,18; Romans 16:3; Matthew 19:29; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19)

Question 1: *Who are Aquila and Priscilla?*

This chapter introduces us to Aquila, a native of Pontus, which is believed to be a Jewish colony (Acts 2:9; 1 Peter 1:1). His coming to Corinth with his wife, Priscilla was precipitated by the edict of Claudius which expelled all Jews from Rome. While in Corinth – a busy commercial centre known for all sorts of pagan cults and immoral practices – they dutifully engaged in tent-making to earn a living. Paul came from Athens on his second missionary journey to engage himself in the same work with them. “**And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers**”.

Aquila and Priscilla were most probably converted before Paul met them. Their conversion must have occurred at the instance of Peter’s preaching after the descent of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost when celebrants from different cities including Aquila’s country home of Pontus were present at Jerusalem. This must have prompted Paul’s immediate association with them in tent-making. They worked and served God together in the ministry. Christian couples forced by negative circumstances to relocate should quickly adjust to earn a living and not make that a reason to be idle and dependent on others. Missionaries need to also avail themselves of opportunities to earn a living for self sustenance.

Paul’s association and friendship must have impacted positively the crucial lesson of consecration and sacrificial service on this couple. While working with them, Paul was also going to the synagogue to preach to the Jews. It is no wonder then that when Paul departed Corinth after eighteen months that they accompanied him to Ephesus before they parted. “**And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow. And he**

came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews” (Acts 18:18,19).

At Ephesus, Aquila and Priscilla met and groomed Apollos, a bold and mighty preacher who had limited knowledge of the word. Apollos had just arrived from Alexandria, the second most influential city in the Roman empire. He was a Jew who grew up in that city and trained in philosophy and rhetoric. Though he was an eloquent and powerful speaker, he had an incomplete message of the gospel. He knew the Old Testament and about John’s baptism. **“And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly”** (Acts 18:26). Apollos needed to get the entire picture, and then he would be a more fruitful witness for Christ.

Upon hearing him preach, Priscilla and Aquila immediately recognized the deficiencies in his message. Consequently, they took him to their home and explained the way of God - the life, death and resurrection of Christ, and the coming of the Holy Spirit more clearly and perfectly to him.

Question 2: What qualities must be possessed by Christians who seek to be used mightily by God today?

Aquila and Priscilla mentored Apollos with the ministry gifts of help and counselling. It was obvious that Apollos had zeal, boldness, willingness to serve, eloquence, meekness, teachable spirit, readiness to obey the word of God and profound understanding of the scripture and sought to harness the gifts for the furtherance of the gospel. These qualities are still necessary for contemporary Christians who seek to be groomed by mature Christians for usefulness in ministry. These qualities are summarized by Paul the apostle as the fruit of the spirit. **“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law”** (Galatians fruit-bearing).

Question 3: What lessons can contemporary Christians learn from the way Aquila and Priscilla expounded the scriptures unto Apollos?

Aquila and Priscilla did not castigate, ridicule or make Apollos a laughing stock like some contemporary Christians would have done today. Neither did they struggle for supremacy over Apollos just because he did not know as much as they knew at the time. What a challenge to contemporary Christians! We can humbly help young and upcoming ministers by way of similar mentoring to the glory of God. **“And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also”** (2 Timothy 2:2).

While still in Ephesus, Aquila and Priscilla established or opened their doors for a church to be founded in their house, especially as it became difficult for believers to gather in the synagogue in the wake of Jewish persecution and the risk of doing so elsewhere. This was what Paul referred to in his epistle to the Corinthians. **“The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.”** This is a challenge to Christian couples to not only participate in gospel outreach and follow up exercise but also surrender their items of property for use in worshipping God. The God they served Who we claim to serve demands no lesser sacrifice from us.

The commitment and sacrifice of this couple was so profound that Apostle Paul could not but appreciate them. We are convinced that having left Corinth with Paul to Ephesus for gospel work, that it was for the same reason they moved to Rome where Paul wrote to greet and thank them for their contribution to the work of God. **“Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus: who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles”** (Romans 16:3,4). Here Paul referred to them as helpers in Christ, who laid down their necks for his sake. Aquila and Priscilla were always available to stand with him even when they could be held as accomplice at moments of intense persecution. But they loved God more than their lives. **“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”** Occasions daily present themselves for believers, nay, Christian couples to practically lay down their lives for the brethren and be commended. **For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it”** (Matthew 16:25).

Question 4: *How did Aquila and Priscilla bring succour to the Church and what lesson can we learn from this?*

EXPLOITS IN PREACHING AFTER GODLY COUNSEL (Acts 18:27,28; Matthew 9:37,38; Mark 16:15-18)

After the tutelage by the Aquila and Priscilla, Apollos became a more effective instrument in the hand of God both in Ephesus and beyond: **“And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace: for he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ”** (Acts 18:27,28). The teaching he received increased his knowledge of the Scripture and instilled more confidence in him to the extent that he became more fruitful in soul-winning and follow-up work.

Question 5: *How can believers fulfill the great commission today?*

The call to carry out the great commission is still on. It is every believer's responsibility to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. **“Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest”** (Matthew 9:37,38). Every child of God must go out with zeal and enthusiasm to preach the word of God and win souls into the kingdom. This can be done through personal evangelism, public ministrations and through literature evangelism. Those who recognize their inadequacies should seek counsel from mature Christian leaders so they can grow. Also, mature believers have God's mandate to build, mentor, disciple and develop younger believers who may be sent forth to other places and nations for the propagation of the gospel. Brethren, workers and ministers travelling to new locations should not go secretly. Rather, they should request for letters of introduction from the Church to enable them join the work force in their new destinations.

EXPECTATIONS OF A GODLY HOME (Acts 18:3,4,18, 24-26; Romans 16:4; Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5; Ephesians 5:31)

From the little the Bible reveals about the private life of this couple, it is clear that they were truly united and that theirs was a successful Christian home. In all the six Bible verses where their names appear, Priscilla (or Prisca as Paul once called it (2 Timothy 4:19) was mentioned thrice before Aquila. Some Bible scholars have suggested that she was most probably stronger in character than her husband. Be that as it may, first mention of her name did not lead to superiority or inferiority complex. They simply complemented each other instead of competing as some do today. Thus, they were united in their experience of the saving grace and power of Christ, holy zeal (Romans 16:3,4), secular employment (Acts 18:3), decision making (Acts 18:26), convictions on scriptures (Acts 18:24-26); consecration and dedication (Romans 16:4), and support of the minister of God and the brethren (Romans 16:4).

Question 6: Explain the importance of unity in the home.

The scripture clearly shows that a united couple have an awesome power at their disposal (Ecclesiastes 4:9; Matthew 18:19). Many Christian couples today are not enjoying this divine providence. They live under the same roof but do practically nothing in common. The life of this couple reveals the possibility of unity in the home that Christian couples need to selflessly and prayerfully pursue.

The foundation of every home must be laid on Christ and His revealed pattern of monogamy to succeed. Obviously, any home that is built without Christ will be full of crises where competition, unhealthy criticism,

Lesson 502

EPHESIAN BELIEVERS RECEIVE THE HOLY GHOST

MEMORY VERSE: “He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost” (Acts 19:2).

TEXT: Acts 19:1-20

The passage of scripture under consideration gives a comprehensive summary of the ministry of Paul the Apostle in Ephesus. The city of Ephesus was the capital and leading business centre of the Roman province of Asia Minor (now, part of present-day Turkey). It was a hub of land and sea transportation and ranked with Antioch in Syria and Alexandria in Egypt as one of the great cities on the Mediterranean Sea. Ephesus was also said to be a centre of black magic and occult practices. The people sought for spells to give them wealth, happiness and success in marriage. Superstition and sorcery were commonplace. The temple of Diana or Artemis, the great goddess of fertility in Ephesus was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was to this city Paul the Apostle came and met a small group of 12 disciples and led them to the experience of Holy Ghost Baptism.

Question 1: *What challenge does the ministry of Paul the Apostle in Ephesus pose to church leaders and ministers today?*

Paul ministered in Ephesus for about three years (Acts 20:31; 19:8,10,22,23). The Apostle did a very thorough work during this period of his ministry among the Ephesians. From Ephesus, every other part of Asia Minor was reached with the gospel; both Jews and Gentiles heard the word of God. The believers had deep spiritual experiences and the church was firmly established in the faith. Christ, the Head of the Church Himself made a very positive remark on the early experience and commitment of this church. He said, **“I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name’s sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted”** (Revelation 2:2,3). In later years when the church **“left its first love”**, the Lord counselled them to **“repent and do the first works”** (Revelation 2:5). Paul’s early work in Ephesus was the standard for succeeding generations. Church leaders and ministers today should strive to achieve similar results in ministry.

Question 2: *How can church denominations and Christian ministries help their members attain higher levels of spiritual experience?*

THE SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES OF BELIEVERS IN EPHESUS (Acts 19:1-7; Matthew 3:1,2,7-11; Mark 1:1-8; Luke 3:2-16; John 1:15,19,32-34; Acts 1:4-8; 2:1-11; 10:44-48; 11:15-18).

“And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost” (Acts 19:1,2).

Paul the Apostle, in literal obedience to the Lord’s command had been moving from place to place preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God. Of late, he had left the city of Corinth in Greece where he had laboured for one year and six months (Acts 18:9) and had come to Ephesus, there he met a company of 12 disciples. This was evidence that gospel work had started there before he came. He began to fellowship with this small group and soon discovered that something was lacking in their Christian experience. And he asked them, **“Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?”** They answered, **“We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.”**

It is not clear why these disciples have not **“heard whether there be any Holy Ghost”** about 25 years after the descent of the Holy Spirit in a baptismal measure upon the believers on the day of Pentecost. It might not have been because they were new converts. This is because even John the Baptist, unto whose baptism they were baptized had always made reference to the Mightier One coming after him who would baptize believers with the Holy Ghost and with fire. But it should be remembered that the Baptist’s doctrine or teaching, unto which they were baptized, related particularly to the Messiah and **“baptism of repentance”**. Or, perhaps, they were not very clear as to the operations of the Holy Ghost. Whatever the case, it is evident that they were

willing to embrace the deeper revelation and new light which the Apostle Paul was about to unveil.

Question 3: *What is the scriptural mode of water baptism?*

“And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John’s baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on Him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 19:3-5). While the issue of their ignorance concerning the Holy Spirit baptism up to the time Paul the Apostle met them remains cloudy to our understanding, there are however, matters that are very clear: first, Paul, through interaction with and observation of their lives was very sure that they were believers (Acts 19:2). He must have clearly seen the fruit of repentance and righteousness in their lives otherwise he would not have asked them whether they had been baptized with the Holy Spirit. Second, the mode of their baptism in water which they claimed to have done was not after the pattern prescribed by Christ (Acts 19:5; Matthew 28:19,20). There are Christian organizations who quote verse 5 to support their practice of baptizing their converts in the name of Jesus alone. But when examined in the light of other Scriptures, the baptism here could only be referring to the word and authority of Jesus in Matthew 28:19. Here, Jesus taught that Christian converts should be immersed in water once in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (see also Matthew 3:16; Acts 8:36-39). Any other method of water baptism is unscriptural.

Question 4: *Identify the spiritual requirements for Holy Ghost baptism and say why some believers in the church today do not have the experience.*

A close examination of the Apostle’s question to these believers shows that he believed absolutely that the baptism of the Holy Spirit was and is for every believer in Christ (Acts 19:2). What a minister believes always determines the extent of his usefulness to the people of God. If the Apostle had not believed wholeheartedly that all believers with sound experience of salvation and accompanying evidence of holy and godly character are supposed to be baptized in the Holy Ghost, he would have left the believers in Ephesus the way he met them. Second, when ministers lack deep and balanced knowledge of important spiritual matters, the exposure, experience and growth of people under their ministry would be seriously limited. Though other ministers of the gospel had been in contact with these believers, they left them without the essential knowledge of a very important spiritual need of their lives – Holy Ghost baptism. Third, there are many good and promising congregation of believers today who lack essential spiritual experiences just because their leaders lack such experiences. The church today, as ever, needs knowledgeable ministers like Paul the Apostle to impart to them the whole counsel of God. Such ministers at each point in time would be able to discern the spiritual needs of members and meet those needs appropriately.

After diagnosing their level of knowledge and spirituality, Paul gave them proper spiritual education and thereafter, led them to the glorious experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. **“And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came upon them and they spake with tongues and prophesied.”** This event occurred many years after the first Pentecost (Acts 2:4) yet, the pattern is consistent

with what happened at the beginning (Acts 2:8). The recipients of the Holy Ghost baptism first believed and lived righteous lives, then they were baptized after which the Apostle laid his hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. We should note however, that believers do not always need to have hands laid on them before they can receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost, in the house of Cornelius and other cases, no one laid hands on the believers to receive the experience. Speaking in tongues is an initial observable evidence of the Holy Spirit baptism. Prophecy and other gifts of the Spirit are other manifestations of the experience.

Question 5: *Identify the ingredients that contributed to the immense growth of Paul's work in Ephesus.*

EXPANSION OF THE GOSPEL IN EPHEBUS (Acts 19:8-20; 20:17-21,31,33-35; 19:26)

Paul the Apostle laboured in Ephesus and its environs for about three years. Though he met a very few number of disciples, they certainly helped his ministry to grow faster in the region. He spent considerable time in the Jewish synagogue speaking boldly and persuading men of the things concerning the Kingdom of God (Acts 19:8). Paul was not the type that cringes before the crowd when issues about his faith were involved. Every minister of Christ should be persuaded about the fundamental teachings of the Scripture and be ready to defend the truth at all times. Besides, extra-ordinary boldness in ministry is one of the evidences of the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

The Apostle equally manifested wisdom in the handling of his converts. When opposition to his teaching grew in the synagogue, he separated the disciples to the school of someone called Tyrannus and there continued preaching and teaching the word of God daily (Acts 19:9) for about two years “**until all that dwell in Asia heard the word of the Lord**”. As a result, God confirmed his ministry with great miracles and “**wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: so that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them**” (Acts 19:11,12). We should not be deterred by oppositions to the truth because the Lord has promised to stand by us. The miracles further publicized the work in Asia and, “**so mightily grew the word of God and prevailed**” (Acts 8:10).

However, certain unbelieving young men, described as “**vagabond Jews**” who were so fascinated with the powerful ministry of Paul attempted to cast out devils like he did. Unknown to them, the demons recognized true servants of Christ and would not bow to hypocrites and strangers to the gospel and power of Christ. Consequently, they were over-powered by the demoniac, humiliated and forced to flee. That incident further confirmed the supernatural nature of Paul's ministry. From all these, we learn that the work of God always grows when members possess sound spiritual experiences; when ministers preach and teach the word persistently and persuasively; and when there are supernatural manifestations in the ministry.

Question 6: *Explain how the work of God can prosper in our hands today in spite of oppositions and difficulties.*

EVIDENCE OF GOSPEL IMPACT IN EPHEBUS (Acts 19:18-20; Matthew 3:6; Romans 10:10; Proverbs 28:13)

Following the public disgrace to the “**seven sons of one Sceva**” and the attendant publicity, the work of God expanded and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. Besides, the event led to a further conviction and conversion of sinners “**and many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds**”. No man can have evidence that he or she is truly saved or regenerated without the desire to confess and forsake his sins. In the Ephesian church, believers not only confessed their sins but also renounced their past involvements in sorcery, occult and magical arts. They were willing to do away with all that connected them with their ugly past. Besides, they did not count the cost of renouncing evil so that they can save themselves from this untoward generation. Through the ministry of this great Apostle, Jesus Christ built His church in Ephesus. The same can happen through all God’s servants today who determine to preach the gospel in spite of challenges.

Lesson 503

OPPOSITION TO THE GOSPEL WORK IN EPHEBUS

MEMORY VERSE: “**Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution**” (2 Timothy 3:12).

TEXT: Acts 19:21-41

This chapter opens with Paul’s exploits in the city of Ephesus during his third missionary journey. Ephesus, as shown in our previous lesson, was a commercial centre and one of the five major cities of the then Roman empire, located in present day Turkey. In it was the famous temple of Diana, a magnificent structure, reputed to be one of the Seven Wonders of the then World. Paul’s success in winning multitude of souls to the Lord, performing outstanding miracles, healing all manner of diseases and casting out demons attracted great opposition from devotees of Diana as our lesson today will reveal.

Meanwhile, Paul’s decision to follow thorough a planned itinerary with Rome as its final destination necessitated his sending faithful representatives - Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia for follow up (Acts 19:21,22). Christian servants need to know how to make effective use time, human and other God-given resources for the propagation of the gospel.

Paul’s continued stay in Ephesus and the attendant sweeping revival after the departure of duo became unbearable for the silversmiths union. Demetrius, the arrow head of the opposition, instigated his fellow craftsmen to riot against the teachings of Paul which he said were detrimental to their trade. The ensuing commotion and uproar in the city lasted for more than two hours, prompting the arrest of a disciple whom God delivered as we shall see in this lesson.

Question 1: Name the major sources of opposition to the gospel work.

When God’s people obey the Great Commission, Satan and his cohorts always instigate opposition against them. Believers should therefore not be surprised at Satan-inspired anti-gospel rules and regulations, mockery, persecution, etc. from

religious groups, heretics, backsliders, pseudo-Christian groups, and merchant men and women whose unwholesome means of livelihood are threatened with the knowledge of the truth. Their primary fear is borne out of the fact that mass conversion of their patrons, supporters and followers will erode the means of enrich themselves at the detriment of others. It is a common trend that when people's means of livelihood is threatened, they resort to mob action as it happened when Paul cast out the evil spirit in a lady at Philippi. **“And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers”** (Acts 16:19).

RELIGIOUS REVOLUTION THROUGH THE GOSPEL'S INFLUENCE (Acts 19:23-27,17-20; 16:16-21; 17:6-8; Luke 12:51-53)

Question 2: Describe the spiritual condition of Ephesus before the coming of the gospel.

Before the advent of the gospel in Ephesus, the mega-city was held in the grip of superstition, demons and darkness. In fact, it was a citadel of Satan, a fort of the underworld and a bastion of the occult. Ephesus was the centre of witchcraft, demonism, the black arts, astrology and occult practices of all kinds. The city was sold out to Satan and his devices. It was common to find priests, magicians, witches, warlocks and quacks of every description in this wicked city. The whole city was enslaved to Satan and his demons, in bondage to the occult, devoted to wanton sexual sins and sold out to materialism. Though it was wealthy, spiritual darkness engulfed the whole city of Ephesus. Religiously, Ephesus was famous for the Temple of Diana, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. This temple was famed as one of the world's greatest buildings. From this temple, a great deal of the commerce of the city flowed. One of the chief products of the town was the silver idols that were made by the artisans of the temple.

Question 3: Describe the spiritual revolution that the preaching of the gospel brought to Ephesus.

However, the condition of the city changed with the coming of Apostle Paul with the gospel message. On hearing the gospel, multitude got converted and these converts openly brought their books of magic, charms, amulets and their papers of white and black arts and piled them up and burned them. **“Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver”** (Act 19:19).

Their confession led to radical change of heart and action, indicating the reality of repentance. If confession is real, it leads to renunciation of sins and of the old life. These converts' salvation was real and genuine unlike the experiences of so many so-called Christians today who are religious but are not righteous (Titus 1:16). The spiritual conditions of our cities today are comparable to, if not worse than, that of Ephesus with prevalence of idolatry, sexual perversion and unbridled crave for unwholesome wealth.

As the Ephesians were turning from idols to Christ, the economy, culture and religion of the city were being seriously affected by the change. The popular silver idols market was coming to extinction due to low patronage. From this, it was evident that

the purpose of the gospel, **“To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me”** (Acts 26:18) was being fulfilled. Those who claim to be genuinely converted must have a change of decision, desire and direction which ultimately leads to a change of destiny. When the gospel is preached with the aid of the Holy Spirit, religion, social and cultural life of the people is deeply affected; a great number of indifferent people are saved and backsliders are restored.

RESOLUTE RESISTANCE AGAINST THE GOSPEL (Acts 19:23-34; 19:9; 16:16-24; Isaiah 56:11,12; 1 Timothy 6:9,10).

Demetrius, for love of gain, organised uproar against Paul. He worked the people up by appealing to their greed. **“And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul’s companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre”** (Acts 19:28, 29). Most unbelievers may remain indifferent to the spreading of the gospel until they are economically affected and then there is tremendous contention and conflict. Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen made their living by making little silver shrines or statues of the goddess Diana and sold them to people as objects of worship for a large profit. The business of making silver idols was getting bad for no other reasons than that the people were getting saved and turning from idolatry unto God. The idol makers were hit where it most hurts their pocket. They probably would have shown no concern about Christianity had it not been that they were losing profits.

Question 4: List and explain the major arguments that Demetrius used to convince fellow silversmiths to oppose the gospel.

Demetrius pointed out three problems that were caused them by the preaching of Paul: loss of money (Acts 19:25), loss of reputation (Acts 19:27) and loss of their god (Acts 19:27). On the loss of money, Demetrius stated that their prosperity is derived from the business of selling silver statues of the goddess Diana. On the second point, he convinced his fellow silversmiths that their business would fall into disrepute and be discredited if Paul was allowed to continue preaching to the crowds that these silver idols were not gods. And finally, that they would lose their god.

Demetrius realized that if Paul was allowed to continue his apostolic teachings unchallenged, Diana may be despised and considered worthless by the people and her glory come to ruin. The reasons many people reject the gospel today are traceable to those stated by Demetrius. Those who work in breweries, tobacco companies and health facilities where abortion procurement is the order of the day, may not be willing to give up the fight against the gospel due to anticipated loss of revenue.

As soon as Demetrius was through with his speech, hell was let loose as the people were filled with rage. The people rushed into the amphitheater and dragged out Alexander, Paul’s traveling companions. The assembly was in confusion and did not give Alexander a chance to make a defense. For two hours, they shouted, **“Great is Diana of the Ephesians”!** The riotous crowd had a choice: silver or salvation, gold or

God; man's business or God's business; Diana or Christ. They let their emotions rule and bowed to an idol rather than Christ.

Question 5: *Itemize some reasons why God allows His children to suffer persecution and opposition.*

There are many reasons God allows His children to suffer opposition and persecution. Most times, opposition and persecution not only make the Christian humble but also remind him of his insufficiency, help him to depend on God (1 Chronicles 5:20) and wean him from the world. They cause him to long for heaven (Hebrews 11:16), show that he, as God's child, is different from sinners (John 15:19) and keep him from worldliness, laziness, and materialism (2 Timothy 2:4). Opposition and persecution creates in the believer a deeper reliance upon the Holy Spirit for all his decisions and help him to cultivate the virtue of endurance (Romans 5:3,4).

REMARKABLE RESCUE THROUGH GOD'S INTERVENTION (Acts 19:35-41; 12:7-12; 16:25-27; 5:17-20; Psalm 34:7; 105:17-20; 146:7; Isaiah 61:1).

As the city was in uproar, the town clerk, a high ranking Roman official, was alerted and he quickly put down the riot. His sudden and timely appearance on this particular occasion to calm down and disperse the angry mob was not a sheer coincidence but a divine arrangement. It was the providence of God that put him on the scene just in time. That was God's hands at work in favour of His faithful children.

The holy writ is filled with catalogues of God miraculous deliverance for His children in the face of stiff persecution and opposition. Such occurrences include Joseph's deliverance from the prison (Genesis 41:14); Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego's deliverance from fiery furnace (Daniel 3:27), Daniel deliverance from the lions' den (Daniel 6:22), Jeremiah's rescue from the dungeon (Jeremiah 38:10), Peter's deliverance from the prison (Acts 12:7) and Paul and Silas' deliverance from Philippian prison (Acts 16:26), just to mention few.

That God has not changed and will still deliver is a great assurance to those who are passing through difficult times. Paul also testified that in the past, present and future, that power to deliver can always be re-enacted. **"Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us"** (2 Corinthians 1:10).

Question 6: *What should be our disposition in the face of opposition?*

Knowing that the God of deliverance never changes (Hebrews 13:8) and that all things work together for his good, the true child of God must not resort to self-pity, regret, despair, murmuring, grumbling and despondence during persecution and opposition. Rather, he should be humble and hopeful, courageous and confident, happy and heaven-minded, turn opposition to opportunity to demonstrate godly disposition. **"But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a**

reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ” (1 Peter 3:14-17).

Lesson 504

PAUL OBSERVES THE LORD’S SUPPER

MEMORY VERSE: “For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me” (1 Corinthians 11:23,24).

TEXT: Acts 20:1-16

Our previous lesson captured the uproar in Ephesus against Paul’s preaching which undermined their idolatrous practices. Those who masterminded it heard Paul well that salvation through Christ would make them forsake the goddess Diana they had hitherto worshipped with its images they made and sold for a living. Thus, they caused the uproar so as to hinder further preaching the gospel. Those who earn a living through sinful practices would ever oppose the gospel. But since the opposition did not make Paul to lose spiritual steam in obeying the great commission, it should not be the reason for believers to stop preaching the gospel.

Having foreseen the likelihood of such occurrence, Christ gave the guideline on what the response of an ardent believer and soul-winner should be. **“But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another...”** (Matthew 10:23). Thus, Paul left Ephesus for Macedonia after the uproar but not without gathering the disciples together and encouraging them. This lesson shows how Paul spoke words of assurance, encouragement and admonition to the Ephesian believers prior to his departure, knowing fully well that the persecution was orchestrated to weaken their hands in the work of God as well as weaken their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He however showed his commitment to all the commandments of the Lord by observing the Lord’s Supper during his missionary journey and work. What a pattern to all believers today!

PAUL’S COURAGE IN THE FACE OF PERSECUTION (Acts 20:1-5; 2 Timothy 3:12; James 5:10; 1 Peter 2:20; Matthew 10:22; 1 Peter 5:10; Deuteronomy 31:6; Psalm 27:3; Matthew 28:18-20).

Demonstrating courage in the face of persecution, Paul **“called unto him the disciples, and embraced them, and departed for to go into Macedonia. And when he had gone over those parts, and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece”**. He needed to encourage them and exhort them to continue in the faith before his departure since it takes courage to remain undaunted in one’s conviction. This was necessary because these converts would not have known yet that persecution was part of the believer’s portion of blessings promised by the Lord, and as such can never destroy but perfect and strengthen their faith (Mark 10:29,30; Matthew 16:18). Paul already knew that suffering for Christ’s name was part of the call of God upon his life (Acts 9:16), the truth which he reiterated in his epistle to the

Philippians later that, **“For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake”**.

Question 1: *On what should believers anchor their courage?*

Believers and missionaries like Paul should anchor their courage on the Person of Christ (Revelation 1:8,11); the pronouncement of Christ (Matthew 16:18); the power of Christ (Matthew 28:18); the promises of Christ (Matthew 28:20); the provision of Christ (Acts 1: 8); and the principle of Christ (Matthew 10:23).

Question 2: *How can believers fulfil the great commission today?*

As Paul moved from Ephesus to Macedonia and then to Greece where he spent three months, he was totally committed to the establishment of the disciples, ensuring that they abide in the Lord and in their conviction. The great commission goes beyond leading people to Christ: it also involves teaching the converts to observe all things (doctrine inclusive) whatsoever the Lord had commanded, training the disciples to become efficient labourers in the kingdom and admonishing the faint-hearted to be strong in the Lord.

PAUL’S COMMITMENT TO CHRIST’S INJUNCTION ON THE LORD’S SUPPER (Act 20:6-12; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Romans 14:5,6; Galatians 4:9-11; Mark 16:9; John 20:19; Revelation 1:10,11; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20)

When Paul left Ephesus on his way to Macedonia (Acts 20:1,2) he passed through Greece and came to Troas preaching the gospel. Troas was an important seaport on the Aegean Sea in northwest Asia Minor and was the main port between Asia Minor and Macedonia. In his missionary Journeys, Paul focused primarily on chief trade towns and capital cities from where he hopes that the gospel message would be carried across the world. Paul was in Troas at least three times. Early in Paul’s second missionary journey, while at Troas, he received the vision leading him to Macedonia (Acts 16:8,9). About seven years later, Paul returned to Troas after the days of unleavened bread mentioned only to describe the time, not to intimate that Paul kept the Passover after the manner of the Jews; for just about this time, he wrote in his first epistle to the church at Corinth, and taught, that Christ is our Passover, and Christians need to live a sincere and truthful life, virtues that unleavened bread connote (1 Corinthians 5:7-8).

On Sunday, being the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them. Our text provides the clearest evidence that New Testament Churches assembled on the first day of the week. In fact, this was the primary service of the week. Paul gathered for fellowship with the Church on Sunday, as revealed here and in 1 Corinthians 16:2. Sunday was the day they received offerings and observed the Lord’s Supper. The teachings of the apostles agree with this practice. Only once did the apostle mention the Sabbath in teaching its proper place (Colossians 2:16). Several other times reference is clearly made to the Sabbath (Romans 14:5, 6; Galatians 4:9-11) and in each of these passages, Christians were urged not to allow the Sabbath to become an issue. Christians observe Sunday being the day of Christ’s resurrection and also following the example of the early church. Neither Saturday nor Sunday is however, the Christian’s Sabbath. We worship a Person (God), not a day. Every day is to be holy to the Lord.

Question 3: *Mention the significance of the Lord's Supper.*

In obedience to the injunction of the Lord (1 Corinthians 11:23,24), Paul observes the Lord's Supper with other disciples. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself instituted the Lord's Supper and He ordained two emblems: unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine. The bread symbolises the sinless body of the Lord, broken for our sins while the fruit of the vine symbolises His Blood shed for the remission of our sins. The Lord's Supper is significant in many respects. One, it serves as a memorial of the vicarious suffering of Jesus Christ for our sins (1 Corinthians 11: 26). Two, it is a memorial of Christ's redeeming grace. **"This do in remembrance of me"**. Like the Passover for the Israelites, the Lord's Supper teaches believers to look back at the Cross. Three, it marks the dramatic and prophetic proclamation of Christ's return and the gathering of the saints unto Him at the rapture and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Mark 14:25, Revelation 19:6-9). Four, it signifies the believers' anticipation and preparation for the coming of Christ. Since the conditions for partaking in the Lord's Supper are the same for partaking in the Rapture, observance of the ordinance keeps us in constant readiness for coming of the Lord. Five, it is an acknowledgement and expression of believer's unity. As we partake at one table and share of one bread, we are reminded that we are a family (1 Corinthians 10: 16, 17). Six, it is a platform to strengthen faith and renew our commitment to Christ as believers. But it is also for warning impudent sinners and backsliders who are presumptuous enough to partake of the Lord's Supper without repenting of their sins. At the first Supper, Judas was warned of the consequence of his treachery but he did not repent and as a result he perished. Seven, the Lord's Supper is a symbol of Christian hope: **"...till he come."**

The Lord's Supper should not be made a mere formality, but always a tender and touching experience. Just like the days of Paul, we receive blessings and not curse if we participate worthily at the Lord's Supper.

Question 4: *What lessons do you learn from the all-night service of Paul?*

Paul had his all-night service in a well-lit apartment. But there were not enough seats for the congregation. A young man, Eutychus, who sat in a window fell into a deep sleep as Paul's message was long. He fell to the ground from the third story and was picked up dead. He was however raised to life by the power of the Lord through Paul. The church would have been grieved by the death of that young man but the Lord prevented it. In such all-night service today, the place of worship should be well illuminated to enable worshippers read and write without difficulty. Provision of seats should be made for all worshippers. Also, proper seating arrangement should be ensured in the church such that no one is sitting in a seemingly dangerous place. Besides, ushers should ensure that they are up and doing in their duties especially in encouraging people not to sleep while the service is going on.

PAUL'S CONSECRATION AND DEDICATION TO MISSION WORK (Acts 20:13-16,17; 9:15; 26:16,17; Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:8; Matthew 9:37)

Paul went on foot to Assos, sail through the sea from there to Mitylene. The next day, he sails off to Kios, then to Samos and on to Miletus, from where he sent for the elders of the Church at Ephesus. Paul's lifestyle demonstrated absolute consecration. He was an ardent evangelist, totally dedicated to the fulfilment of the great

commission. His lifestyle portrays a strong bias for missions. Paul had burden for the Gentiles, willing to make sacrifice to win multitudes of them to the Lord.

Question 5: *How central is mission work to the great commission?*

Mission is central to the charge of the Lord, generally called the great commission. The church is commissioned to **“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations.... ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth”** (Matthew 28:19; Acts 1: 8). God recognises no national boundaries. He commands the Church to seek the lost both near and far. The work of the church is not restricted to its immediate environs. God wants every nation and culture to be reached. He expects converts from **“all nations, and kindred and people and tongues”** (Revelation 7:9).

Question 6: *Mention important qualifications a potential missionary must possess.*

Like Paul, the men and women who will bear the gospel to the ends of the earth should be people who have a current experience of salvation, sanctification and Holy Spirit baptism. A true missionary also needs the calling of God to serve in that capacity apart from unwavering purpose, faithfulness and commitment to God, His cause, His word and the Church.

There are clarion calls from Africa, America, Europe, Asia and Australia. It is high time we obeyed the Lord’s command is to **“go”** and **“preach the gospel”** to all men everywhere, teaching them to **“observe all things”** he has commanded.

Lesson 505

TOTAL FREEDOM FROM SIN

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

TEXT: 1 John 3:1-10

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

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

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

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

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

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

Though the Scripture declares that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; and that the wages of sin is death, God’s plan is for man to be completely set free from the bondage of sin. This was the reason He gave us the greatest gift on earth. **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life”** (John 3:16).

Jesus died and rose again to save sinners from sin and make him a son of God. **“But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name”** (John 1:12). The words **‘become the sons of God’** reveal that all are not children of God (Ephesians 2:3; 5:6; Colossians 3:6; Luke 15:11-24) but are, at the point of repentance, transformed and given the power to live a new life of righteousness.

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

The major identifying mark of every child of God is total freedom from sin. Many religious people do not have the assurance of total freedom from sin and boldly declare with other children of God that **“Beloved, now are we the sons of God”**. Incidentally, it is this assurance that births the hope of seeing Christ at His coming, that make believers bold to affirm that **“we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is”**.

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

Assurance of salvation is a function of faith in God’s truthfulness and power to do whatever He says. He cannot lie. When He declared in the Scriptures that He is **“ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon [Him]”**, that **“If we**

confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness", He fulfils His part in the lives of those who do their part by genuinely repenting of their sins. And when we humbly pray to Him, He answers because He delights in our freedom from sin.

Besides, God sends the Spirit of His Son into the heart of everyone who is converted to assure him that he is now His child. Those who do not have this initial deposit of the Spirit of God that **"beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God"** do not belong to Christ. It is this same Spirit that kindles holy passion and love for God, His word and people in the heart of the believer. By His operation, the believer who is set free from sin hungers to know more of God through regular fellowship attendance and constant reading, studying or listening, meditating and praying-in the word of God. As a child of God, he finds the Spirit helping him in prayer, calling **"Abba, Father"**. As a new creature, God hears and answers his prayer of faith as this is the only communication line through which he can receive more grace for abundant and victorious Christian living. Thus set free from sin, the believer is to seek to fit into the mould of Christ, to be conformed to His life of righteousness as the express image of the Almighty God.

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

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

Loose living encouraged by the doctrine of eternal security of believers is the bane of present-day Christianity. The apostle Paul knew that everyone who receives God's grace is free from sin. He says, **"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"** It is the height of self-delusion to live in sin among the choristers, ushers, ministers, workers, and feel comfortable that you are a child of God. Sin is **"the transgression of the law"** of God or lawlessness.

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

The word of God is so clear on the standard of conduct expected from professing believers. Those who really abide in Christ do not sin. Those who claim that they are in Christ and are living in sin are deceiving themselves. He that doeth righteousness is righteous; for a righteous man is known by the righteous acts which he does. For if a

man sins it is evident that he is not abiding in Christ. To taste of eternal salvation requires that we abide in Christ till the end. Abiding in Christ is not only evidence that the believer is totally free from sin but it is also an antidote to falling into sin and be lost. **“Whoever abideth in him sinneth not: whoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him...Whoever is born of God doth not commit sin... he cannot sin, because he is born of God”**. It is dreadful to be given this portion to read at the gate of heaven as reason for disqualification from entering in. But the truth is that you cannot claim ignorance of it anymore. If it were not possible to be free from sin Christ would not have declared, **“sin no more”** and **“go and sin no more”** to those who received forgiveness from Him before His crucifixion (John 5:14; 8:11). Obviously, His death and resurrection place us on a higher spiritual platform to live a life of complete freedom from sin.

It is a terrible thing to be ensnared into sin. Sin stings like scorpion and injects poison into the spiritual life blood of compromisers. It should not be once named among us **“as becometh saints”**. Sin is horrible. It grieves God, annoys the Spirit of God and displeases the Saviour. Sin is deadly: it spreads and kills with reckless speed. It were better for a believer to die than for him to taste the bitter dregs of sin. Those who toy with sin and promise themselves to repent later are only gambling with their chances of seeing Him on the last day because they may never return. Therefore, to yield to the seductions of sin is to secure accommodation in eternal hell.

Today many people are playing religion. They love outward show but they lack true freedom from sin. Such people may make loud professions, shout Hallelujah a thousand times and attend every Christian conference, they cannot claim to have experienced scriptural Christianity unless they are free – totally free from sin. If we do anything in the name of religion but lack personal freedom from sin, we are deceiving ourselves. True Christianity is centred on entire freedom from sin. Unless you get to the point you have nothing to do with sin, you have not discovered and experienced God’s great purpose for you.

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

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

From our text, Christ **“is pure”**, **“in him is no sin”** and **“he is righteous”**. The uniform testimony of scriptures is that He lived a sinless life. He once enquired from His critics, **“which of you convinceth me of sin?”** His enemies confessed that they could find no sin in Him. Pilate said: **“I am innocent of the blood of this righteous man”**. Believers are saved to pattern their lives after Christ who is our perfect Example. We are saved to do righteousness and good works as He did.

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

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

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

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

The declaration of the scripture concerning this indispensable experience should unsettle those who are contented with just being saved. Christ says, “**the pure in heart**” are blessed because it is only they that can see God. Where then is the blessedness of your Christian profession if you cannot see God at the end of life, having failed to obtain this experience that Christ’s sacrifice has procured for you? How do you hope to get to heaven having not possessed the experience and living in “**holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord?**” Hearts that brew hatred, malice, lusts, evil thoughts and devices, etc. disqualify from seeing the Lord. Good Christian comportment and decorum that conceal anger, jealousy, and stubbornness in the heart are signs the so-called believer will be able to answer the roll call in heaven. God has a holy intelligence that decodes motives behind our actions. He knows those who are His and those who He has cleansed from outward and inward sins.

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

MEMORY VERSE: “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ” (**Colossians 3:23,24**).

TEXT: Romans 12:3-8

The believer is saved to serve. And the scripture is replete with this truth as the basis of God’s exercise of mercy and redemptive work in the believer. For instance, while Israel was in bondage in Egypt, God sent Moses to release them so they can serve Him. It is for this same reason that Christ died and rose again, “**That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life**” (Luke 1:74,75).

Question 1: *Why should believers render consecrated service to God?*

This subject of believers’ usefulness is pivotal to the advancement of God’s kingdom. The Lord’s Prayer, “**Thy Kingdom come**” would be a mere liturgy to be recited without any practical implication or fulfillment of it if the believer were to remain indolent and idle. But the truth is that, every blessing the believer receives from God carries a responsibility with it. In the parable of the talents in particular, the slothful servant who gave excuses for not being profitable was condemned and judged. It is not out of place then for Apostle Paul to harp on the noble responsibility of the believer in advancing the kingdom of God. That service can be profitable and rewarding or unprofitable and unrewarding is revealed in the life and attitude of Christian servants. Apostle Paul here gives practical directions and discourse on how the consecrated believer should use his gifts fruitfully in the church of the living God.

. **GRACE AND HUMILITY IN SERVICE** (Romans 12:3,16; 1 Corinthians 15:10; 3:10; Luke 14:11; Proverbs 16:18,19; 25:27).

Question 2: *Explain the priority of grace and humility in the service of God.*

“**For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith**” (Romans 12:3). The practical instructions Paul passes to the believer is as a result of his experience on the way to Damascus when he met Christ. He could boast of nothing his human ingenuity had done or could do. He said he owed everything to “**the grace given unto me**”. How indicting this is to Christian ministers who indeed received the grace of God but now boast of their own achievements. Christian servants who minister with pride are bereft of the grace of God. The proud do not have the grace of God because self has taken the center stage in their service. But Paul affirms that the believer’s focus should be on God. If in wisdom “**God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith**”, what then is the basis for pride?

Humility precedes service and usefulness. Humility is a priceless Christian virtue. It is a state of modesty, meekness and sobriety. Humility enables the believer to have a modest sense or imagination of his significance. The apostle enjoins the saint to think soberly of himself, according to the limitation of the measure of faith God has imparted to Him.

Question 3: Why are believers warned not to be proud?

As the apostle underscored the necessity of service for every consecrated believer, he cautions us against the destructive nature of pride. Pride is anathema to Christian life and service. It destroys whatever a man does for God. Pride truncates a growing, progressive ministry. It is only when a believer is humble that God can use him for His glory. Pride is a besetting temptation of the human nature. Man is prone to exaggerate his own abilities and merits. The apostle would not take the subject lightly but repeated his warning in verse sixteen: **“Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate.”** Paul left no room for the rich, educated or highly placed brethren in the church to display their opulent status but to condescend voluntarily and assume equality with others who may be less privileged. Our Lord did not spare the proud in heart: rich or poor. **“For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted”** (Luke 14:11).

The believer must realize that his salvation, gifts or talents are by grace. This knowledge will shut out pride from him. If we must be useful vessels in Christ’s hand, we must be cleansed from pride, vainglory and boasting. Pride makes the believer and all his talents, like those of Lucifer, to be useless and worthless. Those intoxicated with pride are running on a slippery precipice. **“Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall. Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud”** (Proverbs 16:18, 19). Absalom fell because of his pomposity and haughtiness. Lucifer, having tasted of the glory of heaven, where believers are still seeking earnestly to go, was cast out of it because of his thoughts and actions of pride. Incidentally, God has incisive and penetrating eyes that decode this hideous monster, pride. Believers must understand that there is a spiritual gravity that pulls the proud down and lifts the humble up. That is why the apostle himself attributed whatever he was to the grace of God. In exhorting the believer here, he did not appeal to his office as an apostle or to the authority he had. On the basis of his humility he exhorts all men to be humble. His exhortation is for everyone.

Note the triple mention of the word **“think.”** Why was the apostle so much concerned with thought? This is because the thought produces the action. Our action and reactions originate from our thought. When a man takes care of his thought pattern he will be able to control himself.

The apostle enjoins the believer not to **“think of himself.”** There are people who are preoccupied with themselves. They would not think of the good of their neighbours nor of the welfare of others. The believer should not think of himself **“more highly than he ought to think.”** He should not have an exaggerated view of himself. But he should think soberly and scripturally. **“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things”** (Philippians 4:8).

The apostle did not think of himself as a superman who is greater, higher and more talented than others. His ministerial greatness was not as a result of his ingenuity. He exalted the grace of God as the main factor in his ministry. Even though he talks of his labour, his exploits and his breakthroughs in ministry (which far exceeded those of his contemporaries) he attributed everything to God’s grace (1 Corinthians 3:10). He wasted no time in making all men realize that his missionary outreach, the writing of the epistles and all the enduring works he had done, were according to the grace of God (1 Timothy 2:12-14). The believer should never at any time lose sight of this truth. Obedience to this body of teaching on relationship would forestall conflicts (personal, interpersonal, church,

family) among the brethren and in the society. The root of strife is when one feels that he has been slighted or that his personality or status is not recognized.

DIVERSITY OF GIFTS (Romans 12:4-6; 1 Corinthians 12:4-31; Ephesians 4:16).

Question 4: *What is the danger of inferiority complex among believers? And how can we overcome the problem?*

Every believer in Christ is potentially endowed to serve God according to the proportion of God's grace in his life. Just as there are no useless members in the body, no believer in Christ is useless except by choice. Just as God condemns superiority complex among members of the body, He equally does not tolerate inferiority complex in any believer. Inferiority complex – the feeling that one is worthless or not needed in the service of God paralyzes and makes people to hide their God-given talents. All the members of the body, seen or hidden, with different but determined places of operation and functions are mutually dependent in the same body. They fulfil their purpose each by working with other members of the body. **“For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith”** (Romans 12:4-6).

Apostle Paul illustrates the gifts in the body of Christ with the members of our natural body. Members of the natural body are not disjointed. Rather, they are mutually united in their operation. As the body is one co-coordinated, organized, cooperating system, so also must the body of Christ be. This is compulsory to ensure the body fulfils its existence.

The body of Christ consists of many members with different ministry gifts. **“Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ”** (1 Corinthians 12: 4, 12). While believers are members one of another, we are not reduced to a dead level of uniformity. So also are the operation of the gifts of believers in the body Christ. Leaders and believers should identify their gifts and also encourage others to identify theirs so they (gifts) can be put to profitable use in the house of God. Christian leaders should also give opportunities to other members of the church to minister so the body of Christ can be edified and Christ glorified.

Question 5: *What qualities of life should be found in each member of the body?*

The apostle shows in our text the qualities and characteristics of each member of the body. First, every member possesses life irrespective of its size or shape. Life is basic to each functioning member. Second, every member is limited. No matter how important, strategic, conspicuous a member may be, it cannot play the entire role or the functions of the entire body. Every member needs other members to be fulfilled. Third, every member is dependent on others: only one member cannot be enough, we need all. Fourth, members complements one another. Members are not competitive but complimentary. There should be no contradiction among believers in the Lord's service: they should each support another. It will be unfortunate for a member to feel so great and so important that he has to contradict or compete with others.

Fifth, there must be unity in diversity. There is room for diversity in the Church of Christ. In the local Church, there is room for varied gifts and activities. But this diversity

must lead only to one thing – unity. Without biblical unity there will be division and confusion. And God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14: 33).

Sixth, disunity delays progress. It defeats purposes, destroys life, decreases usefulness, and deprives us of our rights. We need to know that some members are conspicuous; they are easily seen. Others are less conspicuous, but this does not diminish their importance in the body. That is how the Lord designed the body and expects the Church to learn from this super-structure. **“For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones”** (Ephesians 5:30).

CONDITIONS OF USEFULNESS (Romans 12: 6-8; 1 Peter 4: 10,11).

“Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness” (Romans 12:6-8).

Clinched in these verses are certain conditions which must be fulfilled to guarantee our usefulness in the body of Christ.

Question 6: Mention five conditions the believer must fulfil to guarantee his usefulness in the body of Christ.

First, we need the grace of God. Gifts are given according to the grace that we have. To possess gifts without corresponding sustaining grace brings destruction. James and John demanded of Christ liberty to command fire on unyielding Samaritans so they can have their way. Their lack of grace of gentleness, humility and self control was exposed.

Second, we must wait and develop our ministry. The more our faith grows the more our proclamation of the gospel. You must develop your faith as you wait on your ministry. If you are gifted as a teacher, remain in it. Teaching moulds immortal souls and inspires the old and the young. Take time to study the Bible very well before teaching.

“He that exhorteth” must wait on exhortation. Believers must not be known to be jack of all trades and master of none. Those with the ministry of giving should do it with cheerfulness; not with complaints and murmuring. Believers whom the Lord has endowed with the ability to rule should be diligent in ruling. Count your service for the Lord more important than any other thing. Be cheerful as you show mercy.

Third, do not minister above that which you have received. **“As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen”** (1 Peter 4:10, 11). The consecrated servant of Christ should minister according to the ability that God has given him. His goal should be to glorify God and not to make a show of his gifts. This is because he who boast of a false gift is like cloud without rain. Fourth, there should be the supreme love of God in our hearts as we minister. Our service must be wrapped in love. Any service without love will not attract any reward (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). Fifth, our service must be rendered and based on the foundation of sound doctrine. **“Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee”** (1 Timothy 4:16). The believer’s life and conduct must not contradict the doctrines of the Bible he believes so that the name of the Lord should not be blasphemed. Finally,

there must be diligence, development and discipline. **“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest”** (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

That our text deals with ministry gifts should not make believers to excuse themselves from discharging their general responsibilities towards their neighbours. Giving, for instance, to meet others’ needs is the responsibility of all believers. But the point is that some are excellent in these areas. Other areas of Christian service where believers can use their talents or gifts for God include ushering, choir, security, etc. For our service to be fruitful and God-glorifying, it requires entire consecration. Self abandonment and complete yieldedness to God makes for excellence in Christian service and ministry. If we carefully cultivate the highlighted qualities of Christian character and spice our service with them, our service will be life-giving, edifying, refreshing and much sought after. Thus, souls will be saved and believers will be edified thereby crediting our accounts of rich rewards and crowns in heaven. Though there are all-encompassing bountiful blessings we enjoy as we serve God on earth, we must grow in consecration and endeavour to get to heaven to be able to receive our rewards.

Lesson 507

HELL: THE DESTINY OF SINNERS

MEMORY VERSE: “And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” **(Revelation 20:15).**

TEXT: Luke 16:19-26; Revelation 20:3-15

The fact and reality of hell are recurring, and thus, important themes in the Scripture. It is vividly captured as the ultimate place of agonizing torment and everlasting punishment in unquenchable fire for those who reject the offer of salvation provided by God through Jesus Christ. Yet, the teaching on hell is not popular in many religious circles of the world. Many people have tried to rationalize the truth of the Bible on this subject due to the frightening credentials of the teaching on hell. Against the attempts of many philosophers to make men believe that hell is not a material place of life after death but a phenomenon of the present, the scripture provides unambiguous and ample illuminations of the fact that hell is the indisputable abode of sinners. That the unregenerate, mortal man does not find the knowledge of a certain divinely ordained eternal punishment a convenient subject to face is pitiable. The Scripture truly affirms that **“the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”** (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Question 1: *What is the essence of teaching the doctrine on hell?*

It should be emphasized, however, that the essence of the teaching of the doctrine on hell is not to scare or frighten hearers but to get them adequately prepared to avert the danger that is inherent in being in that terrible place throughout eternity.

WRONG NOTIONS ABOUT HELL (Psalm 9:17; 1 Corinthians 2:14; 1:18,21,23;

It is unfortunate that fearsome as hell is, erroneous and unscriptural views of false teachers have largely interfered with the essence of the message, that is, to forewarn wayfarers of the danger that lies ahead. Even in religious circles, Bible-carrying individuals are not spared this assault.

Question 2: *Mention some erroneous beliefs of religious sects about hell.*

Chief among these false ideas about the eternal doom of the wicked are the doctrines of purgatory and annihilation. The doctrine of purgatory has it that there is an intermediate state between death and appearance before God in judgment where the unrighteous dead stays for a while to suffer during which his concerned saviours can “atone” for his sins and “qualify him for heaven”. The second false doctrine – annihilation – states that sinners will be burnt up in hell at once. These doctrines are as false as they are unbiblical. But strange enough, most of the congregations that uphold them believe that there is a place of blessedness where the righteous will live in full consciousness for ever after death. The future punishment of the wicked is eternal while the sinner at death automatically receives an express translation into hell “**where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched**” (Mark 9:48). The needless controversy over the reality of hell is not strange. Actually, no man believes in hell because he simply wants to; he believes in hell because he is compelled to do so.

THE FACT AND REALITY OF HELL (Psalm 9:17; Matthew 7:15-19; Revelation 14:10,11; Matthew 5:22,29; 10:28; 18:8,9; Mark 9:43-48; Luke 12:5; 16:19-31; Matthew 25:41-46; James 3:6). It is true that eternal punishment is not a pleasant subject for discussion; yet, it is a fearful reality, an awful and tragic fate of those who fail to appropriate God’s provision for their salvation here on earth. Since God is holy, sin must be punished. To speak otherwise is to “**speak not according to this word... because there is no light in them**” (Isaiah 8:20). Even commonsense agrees that ‘if there be a paradise for virtues, there must be a hell for crimes.’

When a sinner dies, his soul immediately proceeds to hell where, with full consciousness, he tastes the excruciating pain that hell offers. The story of Lazarus and the rich man best illustrates the eternal punishment awaiting sinners (Luke 16:23,24). Hell is also a place where the memory of the damned comes alive. The rich man recalled his riotous living while on earth as well as his five brothers that were yet unsaved. Beside the acute discomfort of hell, the regret of an error of judgment while on earth on the part of the unsaved, presents an everlasting torment on its own.

Question 3: *What does the emphasis in the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ teach us about the reality of hell?*

The word of God is clear with respect to the teaching on hell. Every part of Scripture makes it clear that hell is a place of everlasting torment in unquenchable

fire. The regular usage of hell in scriptures, apart from the allusions drawn to it by the Lord and other Bible characters, lend enough credence to its reality.

The Lord Jesus Christ spent considerable time lending credence to this reality. He warned the city of Capernaum, for instance, that it would be turned into hell because of its iniquities (Matthew 11:23,24). He did not mince words as He warned repeatedly on the danger of hell and the need for His listeners to steer clear of it (Matthew 5:22,29,30; 10:28; Luke 12:5). He made it clear that there was everlasting punishment and an eternal abode for all sinners who die unsaved (Matthew 7:15-19; 18:9; Revelation 14:10,11; Matthew 25:41-46). He also repeated three times the fact that, in hell, **“their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched”** (Mark 9:43-48).

The Apostles were also united in their warning against the danger of hell as an eternal place of doom for sinners (Romans 2:5-9; Hebrews 10:26,27; James 3:5,6; 2 Peter 3:7; Jude 7,23). John the Baptist was very clear on the issue and made it plain that **“trees that bringeth not forth good fruit”** shall be **“cast into the fire”** (Matthew 3:7-10). Therefore, the church cannot take a less specific position on the teaching. Those who know the truth (and perhaps taught others) but fail to live righteously should bear in mind that God is no respecter of persons and that **“the soul that sinneth it shall die”** (Ezekiel 18:20) and shall have its **“part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone”** (Revelation 21:8).

ESCAPING THE DANGER OF HELL (Matthew 7:14; Isaiah 52:11; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; 7:1; Revelation 21:1-8,27; 22:14).

Question 4: *To avoid hell, what does God command the sinner and the believer to do?*

It will be utter foolishness for anyone to deceive himself for any reason and trifle with sin and its consequent eternal doom. Everyone – within and outside the church – must live with the consciousness that **“the wicked shall be turned into hell”** (Psalm 9:17) irrespective of age, sex, social status, educational background, nationality or tribe.

Those whose nature and lifestyle can be described as unclean, those who are beastly and those who are not on the highway of holiness are on the roadway to hell. The way to hell is broad because it has a lot of latitude. In it there is no restriction, self-denial, submission to God’s will, sacrifice or consecration. Fornication, homosexuality, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, covetousness, anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication, lying are some of the sins that characterize the lives of people on the roadway. The destiny of everyone who remains obstinate in sin is hell.

But everyone who seeks to escape from hell must be free from every sin. Those who will escape hell must have a definite change of life, character and aspirations. They must come over from the roadway to the narrow way **where they can serve God in holiness, remain uncompromising and follow the totality of God’s word the rest days of their lives. God wants us to be clean, holy and righteous to be able to get to heaven. Continuity in the narrow way requires separation from unbelievers to avoid being smeared by unclean, sinful lifestyle. God’s express command to everyone is to come out of defilement and sin into the highway of**

holiness; the sinner must repent of his sins and exercise faith in Christ's blood for cleansing. And those that have entered must not only pray for sustaining grace to continue on the path of holiness and righteousness that leads to the heavenly city, but must also help others to come into this narrow path.