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LESSON 456

MOSES RECALLS ISRAEL'S HISTORY

MEMORY VERSE: “**This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not**” (LaTEXT: Deuteronomy 1:1-46mentations 3:21,22).

This study introduces us to the fifth book of Moses, called Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy literally means “copy of the law” or “second law” or “repetition of the law”. It is so called because it contains a repetition of most of the laws which had earlier been given to the children of Israel. The primary purpose of the book was to prepare Israel for the land which God promised their forefathers. In our text, Moses recounts the goodness and faithfulness of God towards them since the time they came out of Egyptian bondage, and he exhorts them to be obedient to Him.

It was very important for Moses to repeat the laws which God had given to Israel for the benefit of the new generation at the plain of Moab because he was about to hand over the mantle of leadership to Joshua and the Israelites were about to enter Canaan. Moses had to remind them of some laws that would only be operative in the new land and also acquaint the new generation who might not be well-informed about God’s dealings with Israel.

Question 1: *Why was it important for Moses to repeat the laws and statutes of God for Israel at the plains of Moab?*

God knew that the children of Israel would face new challenges, new enemies and new temptations when they enter Canaan. Therefore, they needed to be encouraged and prepared beforehand. For this reason, Moses had to remind them of the existing laws and provisions, and also add particular directives on other issues.

However, it should be noted that the book of Deuteronomy is not a mere repetition of what had been given before in the other books of the Pentateuch, but a befitting complement and exposition to the new generation of Israel. As a matter of fact, the very structure of Deuteronomy suggests that it is a written treaty or covenant between two parties; that is, between God and His people, Israel. “**These are the words of the covenant which the LORD commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, beside the covenant which he made with them in Horeb**” (Deuteronomy 29:1). The first generation of the Israelites who made covenant with God at Horeb (Mount Sinai) had died in the wilderness. Therefore, it was necessary for the new generation to make their own covenant with God before entering Canaan. This would enable them to understand the terms of their relationship with Him and the conditions for enjoying His promised blessings. From this we learn that each individual must have personal encounter with God. Children cannot depend on

the covenant relationship of their parents with God, rather, they must know God personally.

THE COMMAND TO MOVE FORWARD (Deuteronomy 1:1-8; 31:2,22,24,27; 32:48-52).

The opening verses of our text give insight into a number of issues. One, the authorship, location and time of writing the book of Deuteronomy (verses 1,3-5). Two, the undue prolonging of the wilderness journey (verse 2). Three, Moses' faithfulness in delivering God's word (verse 3). Four, God's command to Israel to leave Horeb and move forward (verse 6). Five, divine directive and communication with Israel.

Moses spoke all the words of Deuteronomy to the children of Israel on the eastern side Jordan, "**in the wilderness, in the plain over against the Red sea, between Paran, and Tophel, and Laban, and Hazeroth, and Dizahab**". All the words were spoken to Israel on the first day of the eleventh month in the fortieth year after Israel came out of Egypt (verses 1,3). This shows that the message of Deuteronomy was given by Moses just before his death, and shortly before the children of Israel entered Canaan. In a way, it was a valedictory message from the one who would soon part ways with Israel after forty years of relationship. It is worthy of note that the fortieth year of Israel's exodus from Egypt was full of significant events. Miriam died in the first month (Numbers 20:1), Aaron died on the first day of the fifth month (Numbers 33:38,39) and towards the end of the year Moses also died (Deuteronomy 1:3; 32:48). In spite of these events, Israel went ahead to enter the land of Canaan. No matter the challenges we face in life, we must press forward in our heavenly journey. Another lesson is that Moses was very busy serving the Lord till his death. As a matter of fact, the last year of his life appeared to be the most busy. We must keep serving the Lord till our final end.

In parenthesis, our text points out how long Israel could have spent in moving from mount Horeb to Kadesh-barnea. "**(There are eleven days' journey from Horeb by the way of mount Seir unto Kadesh-barnea)**" (Deuteronomy 1:2). The distance was about 175 miles or 280 kilometres but it took Israel nearly forty years to make the journey because of their disobedience. From this, we learn that people are sometimes delayed or totally hindered from reaching their God-appointed destiny not because of difficulty but because of the hardness of their heart.

Question 2: *In what ways can believers, like the children of Israel, unduly delay the fulfillment of God's plan for their lives?*

For Israel, it was on account of their unbelief, rebellion and disobedience that eleven days' journey degenerated into a long, tortuous experience of forty years. Believers should take heed lest their journey through life be unduly prolonged. When grief, deprivation and ill-health come (Deuteronomy 8:2-6), a negative attitude can make the believer spend longer periods grappling with the problem. As a result, a trial that should last a short while can degenerate into a life time of failure and misery.

In contrast, Moses was faithful in speaking to Israel only as God directed him. He did not speak presumptuously but only as God instructed him to recall

the history of the children of Israel. Christian ministers, like Moses, should always wait before the Lord to receive their messages from Him.

Question 3: *What challenge can we receive from the fact that Moses spoke to Israel only as God directed him?*

Moses began recalling the history of Israel from the time they entered into covenant with God at Mount Sinai (Horeb) which they reached within three months after living Egypt. Having spent almost a year at mount Horeb, God commanded them to move forward. He did not want them to lose focus of their destination despite the memorable events that took place at Mount Sinai. Even so, believers must never allow whatever experiences or discouraging events to hinder their spiritual progress; rather, like Paul the apostle, we must press forward and keep moving towards our goal (Philippians 3:13,14).

It is significant that God told the children of Israel that Israel had stayed long enough at Sinai. One would have thought that with the pillars of cloud and fire as guides, they would have no need of divine communication on when to move forward or stay. However, God wants His people to know that these physical emblems were not intended to replace His personal communication with them. This means that, as believers, even when our course in life seems straightforward and clear, we should still maintain close communion with God. We must not become mechanical in our use of the means of grace which God has provided to aid us; rather, we should seek regular, intimate fellowship with God.

THE CHOICE OF MEN TO ASSIST MOSES (Deuteronomy 1:9-18; Exodus 18:17-26).

As Moses went down memory lane, he reminded the people of the circumstances that led to the appointment of judicial and tribal leaders to assist in the administration of justice and political matters. At a time, it was Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, who counseled him to appoint special assistants to help him in the ministry. However in this account, Moses gave insight as to how the exercise was carried out. First, he told the people that he was not able to bear their problems alone on account of their number.

Moses listened to the good counsel of his father-in-law and publicly admitted his limitations before the people. Second, he did not singularly appoint leaders without regard for requisite qualifications and input of the people. He stated the leadership qualities which eligible candidates must possess, and allowed the various tribes to nominate their judicial or civil rulers. Three, those to be appointed as rulers must have wisdom, understanding, fairness, impartiality and integrity. They must be well known and of good reputation among their respective tribes.

Fourth, Moses appointed these candidates and set them in hierarchies of leadership for proper and prompt management of cases. Fifth, he gave them operational guidelines and commanded them to give all parties fair hearing. Today, these principles are relevant for good governance in the church or society. Leaders need a combination of wisdom and understanding to get the facts and ascertain the truth of a matter; but they also need the fear of God to be able to declare and enforce that truth.

Question 4: Point out a major difference between secular and spiritual appointment of leaders.

However, there is need to distinguish between appointing judicial/political leaders, which Moses described here, and spiritual leaders such as Eleazar, the High Priest or Joshua the successor of Moses. In choosing the former, Moses followed democratic principles by allowing the people to nominate those who would lead their respective tribes. But for the latter, he depended on God to appoint those whom He chose. This distinction is important to avoid bringing principles of secular politics into spiritual leadership.

CONSEQUENCE OF MURMURING AND DISOBEDIENCE (Deuteronomy 1:19-46; Numbers 13:1-31; 14:1-3).

Moses rehearsed the unfortunate incidents that led to Israel's forty years of wandering as well as his own failure to enter the Promised Land. First, he recalled his efforts at encouraging them to enter the land (verses 19-21,29-31). Second, he reviewed the suggestion and decision to send twelve spies to view Canaan (verses 22-24). Third, the report of the spies and the response of the people (verses 25-28). Fourth, his own failure and God's anger (verse 37); and fifth, Israel's presumption and their sin of unbelief (verses 41-46).

In the original account in Numbers, God told Moses to send the spies, but in our text Moses gave further details as to why and how the spies were sent. It was the people who suggested the idea of sending men to spy the land and Moses, considering their request a harmless one, received God's approval to do so. So, the spies were sent to determine not whether to enter the land or not, but how to possess it.

Question 5: What lessons do we learn from the account of sending the twelve spies, as related by Moses in Deuteronomy?

Here, we see one of the different ways in which God spoke to His people in the past. "**God, [who] at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets...**" (Hebrews 1:1). Even today, God can speak to His children through the godly counsel of other believers. Second, when God gives us a gift, we should take it at once without any delay or doubt. The children of Israel were unnecessarily slow in entering the land. On His part, "**God suffered** (permitted) **their manners**" (Acts 13:18) and patiently put up with them while they lingered. Eventually, their delay contributed to their failure and inability to enter in. We should not delay in taking God's gifts of salvation, sanctification, Holy Ghost baptism, and the fullness of blessings that Calvary has made available for us.

Third, majority of the spies, in giving their report, went beyond their terms of reference and made conclusions that led to unbelief among the people. Whenever we are given an assignment, we should stay within the limits of the instructions given to us. Fourth, Moses knew that God wanted Israel to enter the land and, as such, he should have insisted that they entered in at once. Or he should have taken the report of the spies privately.

Fifth, Israel's unbelief and rebellion in response to the report, reminds us of the need to have faith in God. Not even the sight of the luscious grapes of Eschol, nor the positive report of Joshua and Caleb could convince them. We should avoid the tendency to believe the negative words of men above the word of God. As we trust His word, He will take care of the negatives.

It is worthy of note that as Moses rehearsed the failure of the Israelites to obey God, he mentioned his own failure and God's anger with him also. This was obviously in reference to the incidence at Meribah where he struck the rock twice instead of speaking to it. He was also guilty of speaking unadvisedly to the people (Numbers 20:10-13; Psalm 106:32,33). Believers should also learn not to cover their own shortcomings while exposing or magnifying the faults of others.

Question 6: What is the proof that the children of Israel were not truly repentant at Kadesh-barnea, and how do people show false penitence today?

Because of Israel's rebellion, God told them to turn back towards the Red sea. But they manifested false repentance by confessing their guilt and soon after, they sinned again. Instead of turning back, they presumed to go and fight the Amorites despite Moses' warning not to do so. False repentance never attract God's pardon.

The case of Israel serves as an object lesson for believers today. First, we must learn to act promptly when God gives us opportunity. Sinners and backsliders should quickly repent when the Spirit of God convicts them. Second, Israel discovered that it takes more than human effort to win battles. Without the presence of God they could not withstand the Amorites. Today, we need the presence of God to win in the battles of life. Third, God's promises are conditional. Therefore, it should ever be remembered that the promises of God are only sure to those who continue in holiness and righteousness, but for those who relapse into sin, there will be judgment, except they repent.

LESSON 457

JOURNEY THROUGH THE WILDERNESS

MEMORY VERSE: “For the LORD thy God hath blessed thee in all the works of thy hand: he knoweth thy walking through this great wilderness: these forty years the LORD thy God hath been with thee; thou hast lacked nothing” (Deuteronomy 2:7).

TEXT: Deuteronomy 2:1-37

In the previous chapter, Moses began to rehearse the history of the children of Israel to the new generation just before they entered Canaan. His purpose for this historical recall was to lead them into a fresh covenant with God and to challenge them to be faithful and obedient to Him when they eventually settle in the land. In our text, he continued the rehearsal with particular focus on their wilderness wanderings and years of divine chastisement. The entire story shines with gracious display of God’s condescension, unfailing love, longsuffering, mercy and goodness, even while chastising His people. Though Israel was under chastisement, God did not totally withdraw His presence and guidance from them. He provided for their needs and protected them in the wilderness.

Question 1: *Mention some attributes of God that could be seen in the way He led Israel through the wilderness.*

REVIEW OF ISRAEL’S JOURNEY FROM KADESH TO MOUNT SEIR
(Deuteronomy 2:1-8; 1:4; Numbers 14:25; 20:14-21; Joshua 24:4).

As a result of Israel’s rebellion at Kadesh-barnea, God told them to turn back to the direction of the Red sea. They were to wander in the wilderness until that generation, which rebelled against God, were totally destroyed (Numbers 14:33). Then, in obedience to God’s command, Moses led the entire congregation, including Caleb and Joshua back into the wilderness.

Question 2: *What led to the wandering of the children of Israel in the wilderness?*

At the heart of Israel’s travail in the wilderness is unbelief coupled with deliberate rebellion against God. This attitude made their journey difficult and unduly prolonged; Moses, Caleb, Joshua and an untold number of innocent children who did not take part in their rebellion also suffered unnecessarily. Two, they complained and murmured against Moses and God. Yet Moses identified with them in their failure. The Lord also guided and directed their movement even during chastisement. God determined their path and how long they were to stay in a particular location (verse 3). This display of divine mercy was intended to teach the new generation of Israel, and indeed all mankind, the true nature of God’s love, and to encourage them to respond to Him with gratitude and worship. It should also encourage those who have sinned to

quickly repent and forsake their sin. This is because the riches of God's goodness and forbearance and longsuffering are intended to lead sinners to repentance (Romans 2:4).

When Israel turned from Kadesh, they journeyed back to mount Seir where the descendants of Esau lived. And God commanded them not to meddle with them because He would not give them their land which He had given to the descendants of Esau. This teaches us that God has set the bounds for our habitation; therefore, we must respect boundaries (Acts 17:26) and recognize the rights and properties of others. Two, we must avoid unnecessary conflict, but relate peaceably with our neighbours (Romans 12:18; Hebrews 12:14; James 3:17). Israel and Edom were blood brothers, and their descendants were expected to maintain a brotherly relationship.

Three, God keeps His promises to all men. Even though the descendants of Esau in mount Seir were not Israelites yet God kept His promise to give them the land (Genesis 36:8; Deuteronomy 2:5). If God could keep His promise even to those who did not have covenant relationship with Him, how much more will He fulfill His promises to us who have covenant relationship with Him through Christ. Four, by preventing Israel from taking the land of the Edomites, God also preserved them from the temptation to settle down outside the land of promise just as they did with the Amorites, east of Jordan (Numbers 32:1-5).

As part of their peaceful overture to Edom, God commanded Israel to buy food or water from their territory. He gave the command to encourage Edom to accept Israel's offer of peaceful passage. Unfortunately, the Edomites rejected Israel's offer and as such, they had to take another route round the land of Edom (Numbers 20:14-21).

Question 3: Enumerate why God forbade Israel from meddling with the descendants of Esau and the lessons for believers.

REHEARSAL OF ISRAEL'S PASSAGE THROUGH MOAB AND AMMON
(Deuteronomy 2:9-23; Genesis 19:36,37; Numbers 21:10-20; 14:29-35; 26:64,65; 2 Chronicles 20:10-12; 1 Corinthians 10:5).

After leaving the territory of the Edomites, the children of Israel came to the lands of Moab and Ammon, both descendants of Lot, Abraham's nephew (Genesis 19:36,37). Again, God commanded them not to distress the Moabites or contend with them in battle because He had already given the land of Moab, also known as Ar, to the descendants of Lot for a possession. Similarly, they were not allowed to distress the children of Ammon or meddle with them because their land would not be given to Israel (Deuteronomy 2:9,19).

For the same reasons of not wanting to renege on His earlier promise to Lot and his descendants, God disallowed Israel from possessing their lands. Moreover, the land of promise, flowing with milk and honey, to which Israel has been called is far better than what they would have should they settle down elsewhere. Believers need to know that God will always work for and give them the best. He will not give us anything short of His perfect will and purpose. We should therefore not settle for His second best even if what is presented to us looks like it. The treasures of this world are fleeting and should be held with

loose hands. True wisdom demands that we should not set our hearts at anytime.

Question 4: *In what ways did God manifest His goodness and severity in dealing with Israel in the wilderness?*

As Israel went on in their journey through the wilderness, God continued to give them physical provision and guidance. But the generation of men of war that rebelled against Him were destroyed from the congregation **“for indeed the hand of the LORD was against them, to destroy them from among the host, until they were consumed”** (Deuteronomy 2:15). Here we see both the goodness and severity of God, the interplay of His mercy and His judgment. In mercy He cared for them and preserved them, but in judgment He overthrew those who believed not. **“Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off”** (Romans 11:22). In the Old Testament God revealed Himself as **“The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation”** (Exodus 34:6,7). This warns us then not to take the goodness of God for granted. As believers, we must not toy with sin in any form, otherwise God’s mercy will give way to His judgment.

RECORD OF ISRAEL’S CONQUEST OVER THE KINGDOM OF SIHON
(Deuteronomy 2:24-37; 20:10-18; Numbers 21:21-31)

After Israel had passed through the lands of Moab and Ammon, they crossed into the land of Sihon the Amorite, king of Heshbon and God specifically told them to contend with him in battle and take his land. The reason God told Israel to contend with him and possess his land should be very obvious: the iniquity of the Amorites was now full (Genesis 15:16) and Israel happened to be God’s instrument of judgment against them.

Here we see God’s longsuffering and patience at work. He gives individuals or nations opportunity to repent and amend their ways because a day of reckoning lies ahead. Before now He had given the Amorites opportunity to turn from wickedness saying that their cup of iniquity was not yet full. That God now wants to overthrow their kingdom is a proof that they had refused to turn to God. We learn therefore that no matter how long wickedness had thrived, God will surely bring it to judgment. Moreover, the lands of Edom, Moab and Ammon, which were spared for the time being, were greatly distressed and subdued by the kings of Israel when they violated the principles of brotherhood and peaceful co-existence on which their security depended (1 Samuel 14:47; 2 Samuel 8:11,12; 2 Chronicles 20:1-27). These nations are also among those that would be possessed by Israel in due time in the future (Psalm 60:6-9; Isaiah 11:14; 63:1-5; Jeremiah 48:47; Amos 9:12).

Therefore, it was not a case of partiality with God to have ordered that the Amorites be defeated in battle. Even to Israel, He warned them not to fall into

the same judgment. **“Defile not ye yourselves in any of these things: for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you: and the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land vomiteth out her inhabitants. Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations; neither any of your own nation nor any stranger that sojourneth among you: that the land spue not you out also, when ye defile it, as it spued out the nations that were before you”** (Leviticus 18:24-26,28). This shows there are no sacred cows with God. If a believer backslides and commits the sins that the unregenerate commits, he or she would suffer the same fate, except he repents. There is no guarantee of God’s favour upon a sinner except he or she repents and comes back to God.

Question 5: *Why was it necessary for the Israelites to offer Sihon a proposal of peace since God had already told them to contend with him in battle?*

God said to Israel, **“behold, I have given into thine hand Sihon the Amorite, king of Heshbon, and his land: begin to possess it, and contend with him in battle”**

(Deuteronomy 2:24). Though God said He had given Sihon into the hand of Israel, Moses still sent messengers to him requesting peaceful passage through his land. They decided to offer Sihon a proposal of peace lest they be seen as the aggressors; and so that he (Sihon) could prove himself deserving of Israel’s military assault against his land. This approach, whereby a city was offered terms of peace before an assault, was actually God’s idea and standard for Israel (Deuteronomy 20:10-12). It was evidence that peaceful settlement of controversies should be preferred to war, and believers should be predisposed to making peace.

Unfortunately, Sihon rejected Israel’s terms of peace. His heart was hardened, just as Pharaoh’s because the day of his judgment had come. He mobilized his army to attack Israel but he was roundly defeated and his land was taken. So, with the defeat of Sihon, Israel began the conquest of the lands near the Promised Land towards the end of their fortieth year after leaving Egypt. In the defeat of Sihon the king of Heshbon, we see the danger of pride and hardness of heart against God. Of a truth, **“only by pride cometh contention”** and **“pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall”** (Proverbs 13:10a; 16:18). To avoid eternal destruction, sinners and backsliders must humble themselves and repent before God; otherwise, they will be destroyed and that without remedy (Proverbs 29:1).

LESSON 458

MOSES RECOUNTS ISRAEL'S EXPERIENCES

MEMORY VERSE: “Ye shall not fear them: for the LORD your God he shall fight for you” (Deuteronomy 3:22).

TEXT: Deuteronomy 3:1-29

At the end of the previous chapter, Moses rehearsed Israel's conquest of the land of the Amorites, towards the eastern side of Jordan. They defeated Sihon the king of Heshbon and took all his land but spared the Ammonites as God directed them. In our text, he continued his historical prologue by reviewing the defeat of Og, king of Bashan. He also recalled how the land east of Jordan was shared; he made a touching remark on his own exclusion from the land of promise also.

The primary reason Moses recounted these experiences was to instill faith and obedience in the hearts of the children of Israel, majority of whom as at the time of the events were either not yet born or were too young to comprehend divine workings among them. So, it was not a matter of repeating history for its sake, but to point out to the new generation that God who helped them to defeat powerful nations and gave them their lands would still be able to help them conquer the land beyond Jordan. All they needed was faith in God, obedience to His commands and courage.

THE DEFEAT OF OG, KING OF BASHAN (Deuteronomy 3:1-11; Numbers 21:33-35; Deuteronomy 31:3-6; Psalm 135:10-12; 136:17-22).

After the defeat of Sihon, king of Heshbon, Israel had to confront Og the king of Bashan. He also was an Amorite and his army was reputed for great exploits in battle. They were well-organized and dreaded by the surrounding nations. Og was a descendant of the giants. Many of the cities in his kingdom were fenced with high walls, gates and bars. As an indication of his terrifying size, his bedstead was said to be more than thirteen feet (four metres) long, and six feet (almost two metres) wide. The physical appearance of Og and his people could make the children of Israel quake, so God had to encourage them that He would deliver him into their hands and they would do to him as they had done to Sihon.

It was usual for God to tell His people “fear not” whenever they are faced with a difficult opposition. Though the enemy may appear stronger, invincible and better equipped, God's people need not fear because the Lord God Himself is with them to fight their battles. And no enemy, however powerful, can withstand God. He said to His people: **“when thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them; for the LORD thy God is with thee, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt...”** (Deuteronomy 20:1). The priest shall also speak to the army of Israel **“and shall say unto them... let not your hearts faint, fear not, and do not tremble, neither be ye terrified because**

of them; for the LORD your God is he that goeth with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you” (Deuteronomy 20:1,3,4). As a matter of fact, the enemies of Israel were already afraid of them because God had earlier promised to make them tremble before Israel (Exodus 15:14-16; Deuteronomy 2:25). Therefore, it would be sheer ignorance to fear those who were already afraid of them.

Question 1: *Why should believers not be afraid of serious challenges of life?*

At different times we are faced with difficulties which may seem to be beyond our natural strength. It may be spiritual or physical but whatever it is, God’s word is “**fear not**”. Fear is produced by a sense of danger or trouble. It can kill or damage a person’s physical body and affect his personality as well. In most cases, fear disorganizes the thought processes, paralyzes and immobilizes the limbs, and impedes urgent, intelligent response to emergencies. Fear can keep a person from evangelizing or from using God’s power to solve life’s problems; and unfortunately, most times, our fears are often unfounded.

there is none. But as believers, we must learn to conquer our fear by putting our faith in God and in His promises. On the other hand, faith is a settled assurance that God will fulfill His promises and help us at the right time. He said, “**I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; and forgettest the LORD thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? And where is the fury of the oppressor?**” (Isaiah 51:12,13).

Another reason believers must not fear is because God is with us in every crisis of life. No matter the challenge we face, He is with us to help, guide and protect. Therefore, like the psalmist, we should be confident and confess that, “**The LORD is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?**”; and, “**God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help, and that right early**” (Psalm 27:1; 46:1,2,5).

Despite the fact that Og and his kingdom posed a formidable obstacle to Israel, God delivered them into their hands and gave Israel a spectacular victory. As believers, we should always remember that the battle is the Lord’s and He will deliver the enemy into our hands if we obey Him.

THE DIVISION OF THE LAND ON THE EAST OF JORDAN (Deuteronomy 3:12-20; Numbers 32:1-5, 16-33; Joshua 13:15-20, 24-28; 22:1-9).

With the defeat of Sihon and Og the kings of the Amorites, the children of Israel secured the land on the east of Jordan. Then Moses recalled how the land was distributed to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half tribe of Manasseh

according to their request because of their livestock. Though granted, the request was with a proviso that these tribes would not settle in their inheritance until they had assisted others to secure theirs.

Question 2: What lessons can we learn from the arrangement to urge the two and a half tribes of Israel to go over Jordan to help other tribes secure their inheritance?

Through the directive, Moses wanted them to be selfless and considerate in their dealings with others. He did not expect them to feel unconcerned about the conquest of the land beyond Jordan simply because they had already received their own inheritance. In the same way, believers should not think of their own welfare alone because there are no challenges presently. Second, there is need to support and cooperate with one another as we fight the battles of life. We must unite to confront the hordes of darkness. Third, we have a responsibility to help others in every way we can so that they can succeed as we do. Fourth, believers should be willing to go the extra mile to avoid being a stumbling block to others. The two and a half tribes had to prove that they were not exploiters and opportunists who only took advantage of the labour of the entire congregation to secure their own inheritance, while abandoning others to their own fate.

Fifth, the arrangement challenges believers to be ready to sacrifice in helping others. These two and a half tribes would need to sacrifice fellowship with their families until other tribes secured their land.

It is worthy of note that in recounting the giving of the land east of Jordan to the two and a half tribes, Moses did not refer to the misunderstanding of intentions that characterized the event when it happened (Numbers 32:16-33). Instead, he said, **“And this land, which was possessed at that time, from Aroer, which is by the river Arnon, and half mount Gilead, and the cities thereof, gave I unto Reubenites, and to the Gadites, And the rest of Gilead, and all Bashan, being the kingdom of Og, gave I unto the half tribe of Manasseh”** (Deuteronomy 3:12,13a). **“And I commanded you at that time, saying, The LORD your God hath given you this land to possess it”** (verse 18). The implication of all this is very clear: Moses would not call to mind matters that had been settled which would add no value to the goal of his message. As far as he was concerned, there was no need to trade blames over past issues. Moreover, since God allowed the two and a half tribes to be given the land in question, it could be rightly said that He had given them the land to possess it.

DIVINE PUNISHMENT AGAINST MOSES (Deuteronomy 3:21-29; 1:37,38; 4:21,22; Numbers 20:11-13; 27:12-14; Psalm 106:32,33).

After recounting his directive to the two and a half tribes, Moses seemed to turn to his successor admonishing him to be of good courage and execute God's project of delivering the land into their hands.

Then he remembered how God turned down his plea to be allowed to cross over Jordan into Canaan; how he was told not to pray anymore about the matter because it was *fait accompli*. Instead, he was to transfer the mantle of leadership to Joshua and encourage him to lead the people into their

possession. Moses obeyed without further argument and charged Joshua not to fear but remember what the Lord had done to the two kings. He reminded him of the past victories which God had given to Israel as a strong basis to trust Him for future victories. **“Ye shall not fear them: for the Lord your God he shall fight for you”** (Deuteronomy 3:22). In effect, he pointed Joshua to the promises of God as well as the testimonies of what He had done for Israel.

Moses’ failure to enter Canaan is very instructive for all believers. One, he spoke unadvisedly because the people provoked him (Psalm 106:32,33). In anger, he struck the Rock when he should have spoken to it (Numbers 20:7-13). We should beware lest other people’s actions lead us to sin. Two, when Israel sinned Moses interceded on their behalf, and God heard him (Exodus 32:7-14, 30-32). However, when he sinned, there was no one to intercede for him. Members of the church should pray for their leaders always. Paul the apostle was always requesting that the churches pray for him (Romans 15:30-32; Ephesians 6:18,19; I Thessalonians 5:25; 2 Thessalonians 2:1,2; Hebrews 13:18,19).

Three, when Moses prayed for himself, his request was denied, though he was importunate, reasonable and God-honouring. We must reckon with God’s overruling will, sovereignty and His justice when we pray and be willing to submit to Him.

Four, it is obvious that God is no respecter of persons. Though Moses was greatly beloved and intimate with God, he was not spared when he sinned. No matter an individual’s rank in the church, God will not spare when sin is found. Five, sin prevented him from reaching the final goal of his ministry despite his labour and great sacrifice.

The case of Moses remained a serious warning to succeeding generations that though God is plenteous in mercy, He is also fearful in judgment. But if we remain in Christ and hold on to Him till the end, we shall surely succeed in life and ministry.

Question 3: Explain how believers can avoid Moses’ mistake.

In spite of the failure of Moses to enter Canaan, his life of practical holiness and openness is exemplary. He was not ashamed to admit openly that he made a mistake and that God rejected his prayer. Many people are too conscious of their own reputation and esteem before men that they can never openly admit their fault. They prefer to share their positive exploits and the good side of their lives.

Like Moses, there should be no shame in openly admitting that we have been chastened for our mistake and carelessness. Besides his openness, Moses did not complain because God denied his request; rather, he was ready to confirm Joshua as Israel’s new leader.

Question 4: What is the evidence that Moses got to heaven, though he did not enter Canaan?

On His part, God re-assured Moses that despite the denial, he would not be a cast away. God, in mercy, allowed him to climb to the top of Pisgah to view the Promised Land. And he saw it, even before the Israelites who would later possess it. Much more than that, Moses got to heaven. He had the honour of appearing with Jesus at His transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-3; Mark

9:2-4). We should realize that the chief end of all spiritual experience is to get to heaven at last. **“Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief”** (Hebrews 4:11).

LESSON 459

EXHORTATION TO OBEDIENCE

MEMORY VERSE: “Thou shalt therefore obey the voice of the LORD thy God, and do his commandments and his statutes, which I command thee this day” (Deuteronomy 27:10).

TEXT: Deuteronomy 4:1-49

Moses had been rehearsing the history of the children of Israel to the new generation which was about to enter the land of Canaan. In the preceding chapter, he recalled their experiences in the conquest of the kings of the Amorites and how the land on the eastern side of Jordan was shared among some tribes in Israel. After the review of God’s mighty acts on behalf of Israel, he began to exhort them not to repeat the mistakes of the old generation but to be obedient to God. In his exhortation, he emphasized the perfection of God’s law, the warning against idolatry, and the need for Israel to acknowledge the Lord as God, especially because of His special love and care.

From this exhortation we learn that obedience is a pre-condition for enjoying God’s blessings. Whereas obedience will attract God’s favour and satisfy His demand for blessings, disobedience will lead to divine displeasure and a forfeiture of His goodness. But, as Moses pointed out, our motive for obeying God should go beyond mere desire to obtain His blessings, and be rooted in loving submission to Him.

Question 1: *What is the real meaning of obedience?*

“Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them,

that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers giveth you” (Deuteronomy 4:1).

We notice the words, **“hearken”** and **“do”**. They summarize what constitute genuine obedience. To obey God is to hear or listen to His word with due reverence, and to do it. This is Christ’s definition of obedience in the New Testament as well. **“But he said, Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it”** (Luke 11:28). We read also in Revelation: **“blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand”** (Revelation 1:3). It is not enough to hear or read the word of God, we must practise it. We must be **“doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves”** (James 1:22). Moses told the children of Israel that if they hearken and do the commandments of God, then they would live and possess the land which God promised them. If we obey God’s commandments we shall reap great blessings and enjoy His favour.

THE COMMAND TO OBEY GOD'S LAW (Deuteronomy 4:1-24; Ecclesiastes 3:14; Revelation 22:18,19).

“Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers giveth you. Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you” (Deuteronomy 4:1,2).

Moses exhorted the children of Israel to listen to the word of God and do it. Listening to the word is the first important step to doing it. To hearken or listen involves hearing the word of God attentively, taking note of special details, making sure one understands what has been heard, knowing what God expects and agreeing to do whatever He says. We need to listen to God's word and obey His commands. But then, Moses made clear to Israel both moral, ceremonial, as well as civil laws which should regulate every facet of their personal, family and communal lives. Like Moses, church leaders should pay special attention to the teaching ministry. Believers must be taught the word of God very clearly so that they can understand the mind of God and give implicit obedience to His demands. People cannot obey God in a proper sense unless they are taught and made to know clearly His expectations from them.

Moses addressed a number of issues in his message. First was the command not to add to, or subtract from God's word (verse 4:2). The word of God is perfect and complete and needs no addition or subtraction. There is nothing superfluous in it. If we add to it, then it becomes a burden; and if we subtract from it, then it becomes incomplete. Therefore, the first step in obedience is to accept God's word as it is.

Question 2: Explain how people add or subtract from God's word today.

People add to or subtract from God's word when they modify it to accommodate their sinful lifestyle, or when they make their man-made laws, traditions and so-called revelations equal with the word of God. The Pharisees were guilty of this error and Jesus rebuked them sharply (Matthew 15:1-9; Mark 7:1-13). All those who equate human writings, however beneficial, with the scriptures are guilty of this offence. Also, people who accept some part of scripture but reject others are guilty of diminishing from the word of God. Likewise, those who cleverly avoid some particular scriptures because they contradict their sinful lifestyle or oppose their humanistic doctrines.

The Bible consists of 66 books: 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New. Other books apart from these are not part of the canon of scripture; they are spurious and not inspired. Therefore, they should be considered as any other literature, which may not be wholly true.

Question 3: What are the benefits of obedience to God's word?

Moses also emphasized the need for Israel to follow the Lord wholeheartedly and avoid the practices of their Canaanite neighbours. He reminded them of the consequences of their sin at Peor when many of them dabbled into immorality and idol worship. All those who participated in that sin were destroyed, and

only those who were faithful to God were spared (Deuteronomy 4:3,4; Numbers 25:1-9). Sin leads to destruction, but obedience tends to life. Moreover, Moses exhorted Israel to cleave to the Lord and obey His commandments because obedience would distinguish them as a wise and understanding nation. Also, their obedience would be a testimony to the world that they were God's people, and that would cause them to be well-esteemed.

Following Moses' exhortation, believers need to be reminded that obedience to the word of God is the evidence of true wisdom. The wisdom of the world is described as "**earthly, sensual and devilish**" (James 3:15). To obey God is to fear Him which is "**the beginning of wisdom**" (Psalm 111:10a; Job 28:28); but to disobey God is an evidence of lack of fear and reverence for Him. Our obedience to God's commandments will attract wisdom, honour, dignity and make us distinct among our neighbours.

In order to ensure that the entire nation of Israel continued in absolute obedience to God, the parents were commanded to teach their children the laws of God "**lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons**" (verse 9b). This would be an effective way of remembering God's great deeds and His demands upon their lives continuously. Today, parents must take full responsibility for the teaching of their children.

Another major point of Moses' address was the warning against idolatry. He strongly cautioned them not to ascribe any physical form or similitude to God, reminding them that during the institution of the original covenant with God at Sinai, they did not see Him in any physical or corporeal essence. Though they saw great manifestations of His presence, they did not see Him in His real, invisible essence. God is a spirit (John 4:24; 1:18; 5:37; Luke 24:36-40; I Timothy 1:17; 6:16; I John 4:12).

Question 4: Explain the idea that God is invisible and yet He was seen by men at different times.

Although there are instances in the Bible when it is said that some people saw God (Exodus 24:9,10; 33:18-23; Judges 13:11-22; Job 42:5; Isaiah 6:5), it should be noted that what they saw were various manifestations of God as He chose to appear to them. Beyond these however, God appeared to us in Jesus Christ, the second person in the divine Trinity. Before His incarnation He was invisible, but during His incarnation, He became a man. "**Yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more**" (2 Corinthians 5:16b).

The main reason Moses emphasized the invisibility of God was to warn the children of Israel not to make any graven image or physical representation of Him. In addition to this warning, they were forbidden from worshipping any of God's creatures, such as the sun, moon or stars which was a common practice by the Canaanites and other nations that surrounded them. But God wanted His people to steer clear of such practices. In the New Testament also, God warns believers to avoid idolatry in all its forms, even spiritual idolatry which manifests in covetousness or inordinate affection for material things (Ezekiel 14:1-3; Matthew 6:24; Colossians 3:5; I John 5:21). As believers in the world today, we must shun every attraction of modern idolatry.

In warning the children of Israel against idolatry and disobedience, Moses used his own personal failure and the divine discipline against him as example of God's severity against sin. He made reference to his failure to enter Canaan as a warning to them (Deuteronomy 1:37; 3:26; 4:21,22). He also described God as a consuming fire. In other words, God is intolerant of sin and He has a holy anger towards those who go into idol worship. God will not tolerate any form of unfaithfulness from His people; neither will He share His glory with graven images.

CAUTION AGAINST BACKSLIDING (Deuteronomy 4:25-40; 8:11-20; I Corinthians 10:12).

“When thou shalt beget children, and children's children, and ye shall have remained long in the land, and shall corrupt yourselves, and make a graven image, or the likeness of any thing, and shall do evil in the sight of the LORD thy God, to provoke him to anger: I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land whereunto ye go over Jordan to possess it; ye shall not prolong your days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed” (Deuteronomy 4:25,26).

Moses warned the children of Israel against the peril of backsliding after God has prospered them. He cautioned them to watch against presumptuous sin, especially after they have settled in Canaan for a long time and must have been blessed and multiplied by God.

Question 5: *Mention some causes of backsliding and its consequences.*

In most cases, backsliding results from inability to manage success and prosperity well. After God has prospered an individual who had been long in poverty, it is common for such a person to become complacent, worldly and carnal (Deuteronomy 4:25; 6:10-12; 32:15; Proverbs 30:8,9). But Moses warned them to be beware lest God should be provoked to anger and destroy the land of their inheritance. Here, Moses spoke prophetically concerning the captivity of Israel in the latter times. They would be scattered among other nations, their number would diminish (verse 27); and they would be in servitude to other people (verse 28). However, God promised that if they repent, He also will be merciful and restore them to their former estate.

This prediction by Moses eventually came to pass as God allowed them to be taken into captivity. The ten tribes, which formed the northern kingdoms, were the first to be taken into Assyrian captivity around 722 B.C. Later, the southern kingdom of Judah, consisting of two tribes were also carried away by the Babylonians around 605 B.C. From this we learn the grave consequences of sin and backsliding. We also learn that we must avoid a break in the transmission of the knowledge of God from generation to generation.

Question 6: *How can believers continue to enjoy the privileges of God's love in Christ?*

Moses also reminded the children of Israel of God's special love for them. One, they had the Lord so close to them and He answered their prayers. Two, God gave them righteous laws and statutes that distinguished them as a peculiar nation. Three, He delivered them from Egypt with unprecedented miracles. Four, He defeated stronger nations for them. Five, He guided them

through the wilderness and entered into a special covenant with them. Six, He gave them the land of Canaan for inheritance.

Just as the Israelites enjoyed special privileges because of their covenant relationship with God, believers today also have special privileges bestowed upon them. The greatest of these is that God's only begotten Son died for our sins at Calvary and bought for us redemption, forgiveness, reconciliation, sonship and intimate fellowship with God (Ephesians 1:3-11; 2:13-18; Colossians 1:12-14; Romans 8:32). However, continuous enjoyment of these privileges depends on our continued obedience to the word of God.

CITIES OF REFUGE IN TRANSJORDAN (Deuteronomy 4:41-49; Numbers 35:10-15; Joshua 20:8-9; 21:27,36,38; I Chronicles 6:63,71,78,80).

Moses appointed three cities of refuge on the east of Jordan as the Lord commanded him. God had earlier directed him to designate six cities of refuge from among the forty-eight cities given to the Levites. These cities were intended to serve as asylum for the accidental manslayer, so that the avenger of blood would not kill him. The three cities of refuge were located along the whole length of the land, one in each territory of the three tribes that occupied the land. In the territory of the Reubenites, Bezer was appointed. This city was the most southern of the cities of refuge, and was part of the lot given to the Levite division of Merari (Joshua 21:36; I Chronicles 6:63,78). For the tribe of Gad, theirs was Ramoth-Gilead. This city was also from the lot of Merarite Levites (Joshua 21:38; 1 Chronicles 6:80). It was taken by the Syrians and Ahab attempted to take it from their hands but was killed in that battle (1 Kings 22:1-37). Then for the Manassites their city of refuge was Golan in Bashan. It was the most northern of the three cities and it fell within the portion of the Gershonite Levites (Joshua 21:27; 1 Chronicles 6:71). This strategic distribution of the cities of refuge ensured that there was refuge near every Israelite who needed to flee from the avenger of blood.

Question 7: *What is the significance of the cities of refuge for sinners and believers today?*

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. **Believers too can continue to enjoy divine protection as they remain steadfast in Christ.**

LESSON 460

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS RESTATED

MEMORY VERSE: “Oh that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!” (Deuteronomy 5:29).

TEXT: Deuteronomy 5:1-33

In the previous study, Moses exhorted the children of Israel to obey God. Towards the end of the chapter, he described the land which Israel had already conquered and gave a brief introduction to the laws and basic requirements of God (Deuteronomy 4:44-49). Now in our text, there is a restatement of the Ten Commandments to remind Israel of their duties and the conditions upon which they would enjoy their covenant relationship with God.

The tendency to forget God’s word and divine dealings was common with the Israelites, and is unfortunately characteristic of some believers today. This restatement is meant to forestall forgetfulness of God’s word and its attendant consequences. If anything, it begets fear of the enemy, moral cowardice and present and eternal regret (Isaiah 51:13; Jeremiah 3:21; Psalm 9:17; 50:22; 78:10,11; Isaiah 17:9-11; Hebrews 2:1). Moses clarified this truth when he said: **“Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears this day, that ye may learn them, and keep, and do them”** (Deuteronomy 5:1). It is the duty, not only of leaders like Moses but also of every believer to remind fellow believers of the tenets of the Christian faith and exhort them to continue to abide in Christ till the end (1 Corinthians 4:17; 2 Peter 1:12; 3:1,2). As we shall see in this study, after Moses referred to the scene of the original covenant which God made with Israel at mount Sinai (Deuteronomy 5:1-5) and restated the Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 5:6-21) to which Israel then promised obedience, he exhorted them to practically obey God so that it might be well with them and their descendants in the land of promise (Deuteronomy 5:22-33).

REFERENCE TO THE ORIGINAL COVENANT AT SINAI (Deuteronomy 5:1-5; Exodus 19:1-9; Malachi 4:4).

“And Moses called all Israel, and said unto them, Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears this day, that ye may learn them, and keep, and do them” (Deuteronomy 5:1).

Here, Moses repeated his earlier emphasis on the need for Israel to hear, learn, keep and do God’s statutes and judgments. As believers, we also have a covenant relationship with God and we must hear, learn, keep and do His commands so that it can be well with us.

We must be diligent to hear God’s word everyday through reading and studying the Bible. But this is not sufficient to make a person grow spiritually, we must learn the word of God. Learning entails that we realize the implications of God’s word upon our lives and make necessary adjustments for its fulfilment. More importantly, we must keep and do it. This demands that we should put the word of God into practice and also defend its truths from being corrupted by false teachers. Keeping and doing the word of God means to earnestly contend

for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints (Jude 3) and that will require first, a personal commitment to that faith, and then committing that faith to others who will faithfully pass it on to the next generation.

Question 1: *How can we put the word of God to practice?*

Having called Israel to diligently obey God's commandments, Moses went further to remind them of the covenant which God made with them at Horeb (Mount Sinai). He said that God did not make the covenant with their fathers but with them. When Israel entered into covenant with God at Sinai, though the new generation, whom Moses was addressing were children below twenty years, except Caleb and Joshua, the covenant was made not just for the sake of the old generation but on behalf of the younger generation as well (verses 2,3). Here, we see the true nature of a covenant. A covenant is an agreement between two parties, and it remains binding unless it is revoked or renounced by either or both parties. The effects of a covenant, whether good or bad, can extend to generations yet unborn.

At Sinai, all the Israelites who were present entered into the covenant with God in person, while those who were babies or yet unborn entered into it by proxy, through their parents. However, as they became mature, they needed to confirm and renew their covenant with God in a personal way (Deuteronomy 29:10-15). The covenant which God made with Israel included some promises which extended beyond the old generation. God promised to make them a holy nation, a peculiar treasure, a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:5,6). He also promised them the land of Canaan, but He demanded obedience from the people before these promises would be fulfilled.

Question 2: *What challenge can believers receive from Moses' review of the experiences of Israel at Mount Sinai?*

Moses took the children of Israel down memory lane when the covenant was originally instituted at Sinai. At that time, God came down upon Mount Sinai and the people saw physical manifestations of His presence. As it were, He spoke intimately with His people and they heard His voice. This was what Moses meant by **"the LORD talked with you face to face in the mount out of the midst of the fire"** (verse 4). They also witnessed at the scene of the covenant, fire, thunders, lightning, a thick cloud, loud voice of trumpet, smoke, earthquake and a voice (Exodus 19:16-20). These physical emblems so overwhelmed the people of Israel that they were afraid to have God speak to them. The purpose of God in all these manifestations was not to intimidate the people but to instil in them a reverential fear of His majesty. That is why Moses referred to this experience and used it as a basis for his new appeal for their obedience.

As believers, we may not expect such physical emblems of God's presence in this new covenant age. This is because God has chosen to speak to us today, primarily through His Son, the Spirit and His written word (Hebrews 1:1,2; John 14:26). Though this does not rule out the possibility of extraordinary manifestations of God's presence whenever He chooses, it is not proper for a believer to seek or base his/her faith on physical manifestations such as Israel experienced at Sinai. As a matter of fact, Peter described the word of God as

more sure word of prophecy in comparison with visible manifestations or experiences (2 Peter 1:16-19).

REVIEW OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS (Deuteronomy 5: 6-21; Exodus 20:2-17; Matthew 15:4-6,19; 19:18; 22:32-40; Mark 10:19; 12:28-31; Luke 12:13-21; 18:20; Galatians 5:14; Ephesians 6:1,2).

After his brief exhortation and historical reference to the sinaitic covenant, Moses restated the Ten Commandments for the children of Israel. These commandments, as contained in our text, were not repeated word for word, rather, they were reviewed with appropriate commentaries and applications for the new situation in Canaan. God began by saying, **“I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage”** (verse 6). In this preface, He would have Israel know the basis and context against which the commandments are given. He is the Lord God, their Creator and Redeemer from Egyptian bondage. And as this was true of Israel, it equally holds true for men today. God the Creator has the authority to legislate and give rules by which His creatures must live. Also, God our Redeemer reserves all rights to stipulate how His redeemed people should live.

The Ten Commandments were originally written by God on two tables of stone, but later, Moses copied them in a book (Deuteronomy 5:22). The first table contained the first four commandments which had to do with the duties of man to God; then the second table contained the remaining six commandments which related to man’s duties to his neighbour.

Question 3: How are the Ten Commandments grouped and how did Jesus summarize them?

The Lord Jesus Christ aptly summarized all the laws on each table by saying, **“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself”** (Matthew 22:37-39). The apostle Paul also pointed out that we fulfil all the law when we love our neighbour. **“For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself”** (Galatians 5:14).

The first commandment prohibits idolatry. **“Thou shall have none other gods before me”** (verse 7). The focus here is on who should be the object of our worship, and that which constitutes the driving force in our lives. There is only one God, the true God and He alone should be worshipped. Therefore, idolatry is putting anything or anyone else ahead of God in our lives. Anything or anyone that we pledge or give allegiance in preference to God is an idol (Ezekiel 14:3; 1 Corinthians 10:14; Galatians 5:20; Colossians 3:5; I Peter 4:3).

The second commandment forbids image worship or the use of images in worship. This promulgation becomes necessary because the human mind is always craving for visible representations of God in an attempt to make Him real to the physical senses. But God is a Spirit and He wants to be worshipped in Spirit and Truth. So He does not want to be equated with any creature or a mere human creation. In this regard, God revealed Himself as a jealous God.

This means He wants the exclusive affection and loyalty of His people, and He will not tolerate spiritual infidelity.

The third commandment deals with reverence for God's name. His name is sacred because it represents His Person; therefore, it must not be dishonoured or used in a profane manner. This commandment forbids the use of God's name in swearing, cursing, fake worship, divination and blasphemy.

The fourth commandment is a direction to keep the Sabbath day holy. Whereas in the original promulgation in the book of Exodus, the reason given for this commandment was on the grounds of creation (Exodus 20:11), but here it was on the ground of Israel's redemption from Egypt (Deuteronomy 5:14). Though the commandment remains the same, the reasons alluded appear to be different. The two reasons should not be seen as a contradiction but complementary. This is because the law of Sabbath, in its true spiritual meaning, has connection with creation as well as redemption. It looks back to the perfect creation of God and it also looks ahead to that perfect rest which remains for the redeemed people of God (Genesis 2:2,3; Hebrews 4:1-11).

The fifth commandment concerned reverence for parents. Children should realize that after their duties to God, their gratitude and honour should next go to their parents. This commandment to honour father and mother is the first command on the second table, and it is the first among the entire Ten Commandments that has a promise attached to it. The promise attached is: **“that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth”** (Ephesians 6:1-3; Exodus 20:12). To honour one's parents is to respect, love and care for them, especially in their old age. Believers are also to obey their spiritual parents in the Lord. That means parents should be obeyed so long as the obedience or duty they require will not conflict with God's demands. There are grievous consequences and punishment for disobedience to parents in the Bible (Deuteronomy 21:18-21; Proverbs 20:20).

The sixth commandment was a prohibition of murder in any form; whether by abortion, self-murder/suicide, sorcery, violence, revenge, poisoning, or exposing our neighbours to anything that can kill them. This commandment shows that human life is very sacred and so precious in the sight of God that it should not be wasted presumptuously.

The seventh commandment forbids adultery. God said **“Neither shalt thou commit adultery”** (verse 18). This promulgation was intended to protect the family life and chastity of God's people. Adultery in the context of the Ten Commandments includes all forms of sexual impurity.

The eighth commandment prohibits theft. This law safeguarded the right of ownership and secured the property of our neighbours. Anything that belongs to another person must not be taken or acquired without his/her express approval or permission. This law also extends to kidnapping (stealing a human being). The Bible calls those who engage in such act as men stealers (1 Timothy 1:10). Whether stealing men for ransom, to sell as slaves (children trafficking), for rituals, or by those who have a morbid desire to own children, it is sinful to steal a human being.

The ninth commandment was meant to protect the good name and reputation of our neighbour. It forbids any testimony that will wrongly incriminate or affect the reputation of another person. This command prohibits slander, libel, defamation of character, false witness in court (perjury) etc. This teaches us that, as believers, we should learn and maintain the ethics of

speech. We should avoid the tendency to speak lightly of others, passing cutting remarks and taunting statements about them.

The tenth commandment was against covetousness. It prohibited every inward desire or longing for things that belong to another person. This commandment went beyond outward action; it reaches to the realms of the mind, desire and ambition. It prohibits inordinate desire for the wife and belongings of our neighbour.

As New Testament believers, the proper interpretation and application of these commandments are best obtained by looking at the teachings of Christ on them. Not only did Jesus Christ summarize all the Ten Commandments, He also gave detailed exposition on each of them. Concerning the nature of God and the folly of idolatry, He said **“God is a spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth”** (John 4:24). He quoted the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth commandments directly (Matthew 19:18; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20), and He expounded extensively on the fourth commandment which deals with the subject of Sabbath. Concerning the Sabbath, He taught that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. By His example He showed that works of mercy should be done on the Sabbath day and that the law was not intended to be a burden (Mark 2:23-28). For believers today, the ritual of Sabbath keeping has been done away with through the finished work of Christ. The focus has shifted from the end of natural creation to that of new creation in Christ, by His death and resurrection.

On the fifth commandment, Christ pointed out that children should honour their parents and not use any religious obligation as a cloak for neglecting this demand (Matthew 15:4-6). Concerning the sixth commandment Christ said, **“Whoever is angry with his brother without a cause”** is a defaulter (Matthew 5:21,22). In other words, anger is incipient murder; though not yet carried out but already at the formidable stage. Also, on the seventh, Jesus explained that to lust after a woman is adultery in the heart (Matthew 5:27,28). This means then that the scope of the law was far beyond the physical regulation of human conduct; it extended to the spiritual dimension as well. Then, on the eighth commandment, He recaptured it as **defraud not** (Mark 10:19); and concerning the ninth commandment, He listed false witness as one of the defiling things that proceed from the heart of men (Matthew 15:19). As for the tenth commandment, Jesus spoke on the prohibition of covetousness. He warned against greed and senseless accumulation of material things for us, pointing out that a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses (Luke 12:13-21).

Question 4: Briefly state the teachings of Jesus on each of the Ten Commandments.

THE RESPONSE OF ISRAEL AND MOSES’ CHARGE (Deuteronomy 5:22-33)

After God had stated the Ten Commandments in the hearing of the entire congregation of Israel, He stopped speaking audibly to them because the people were afraid. Therefore, He gave the remaining statutes and judgments to them through Moses. The children of Israel responded to God’s awesome presence and majesty at Sinai with fear and trembling. But, looking at their response to

God because of the physical phenomena they witnessed on Mount Sinai, it would appear that they had a genuine reverence for God. But a closer look at what they said, and God's lamentation concerning them, showed that their response was merely emotional. They were overwhelmed by the physical emblems of God's presence but their hearts remained unchanged. As a matter of fact, their response revealed some strange inconsistencies. First, they admitted that God had shown them His glory and greatness, and that they heard His voice out of the midst of the fire. They also confessed that they had seen that God could speak with a man and not die. However, they went ahead to contradict their confession by saying that God should not speak directly to them any more lest they die (verses 23,24).

Thus, Israel chose not to hear from God firsthand through personal intimacy with Him but via the agency of Moses (verses 25-27). The Lord approved their request and Moses became their mediator. Then God asked Moses to come near to hear further commands and instructions to pass on to the people. The danger of this position, which Israel inadvertently put themselves, is very obvious. The long absence of Moses from the camp in order to receive from God, left a big vacuum which gave them opportunity to descend into idolatry (Exodus 32:1-4). If only they had remained with Moses in God's presence, they would have escaped this snare which brought terrible judgment upon them. Believers should never substitute personal intimacy with God for anything. And whether leaders are present with them or not, they should live transparently holy. God's best desire for His people is, "**Oh that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever**" (verse 29). God is never deceived by mere profession or outward show of piety and reverence. He knows the hearts of men and he can discern whether their confession is genuine or not.

Question 5: What lessons can believers learn from the immediate response of Israel to God's presence at Sinai?

There are many lessons to learn both from the response of Israel to the descent of divine presence at Sinai, and also from God's reaction to their response. One, the case of Israel reminds us that it is easy to speak words of commitments and total surrender to God, especially when we see some striking manifestations of His presence. But as one settles down in the ordinary course of life, such promises of loyalty are quickly forgotten. Two, we should not attempt to shift our personal spiritual responsibility to others. It is our duty to hear from God and obey Him always. We must not shirk our responsibility of regular Bible reading, prayer and personal spiritual development. We must learn to hear God speak to us personally and not depend on any human or secondary source. Three, we must not stay back while others are gathered to hear God's word (Hebrews 10:25). Four, in every age, God's desire is that His people remain obedient to Him so that He could bless them. This desire that God expressed concerning Israel at Sinai has been shown on several occasions in scripture (Psalm 81:13-16; Isaiah 48:18,19; Psalm 119:165; Deuteronomy 32:29; Jeremiah 7:23-26).

Finally, in the new dispensation Christ only is the Mediator between man and God (1 Timothy 2:5). We do not need to go through any human intermediary before we can communicate with God. This is because Christ's

LESSON 461

CONVERSION OF THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH

MEMORY VERSE: "Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also" (Romans 3:29).

TEXT: Acts 8:26-36

In His valedictory exhortation to His disciples, our Lord Jesus Christ declared, **"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth"** (Acts 1:8). Following the establishment and growth of the church in Jerusalem and the spread of the gospel to surrounding cities like Judea and Samaria, the Lord now beamed the light of the gospel towards the Gentiles. Indeed, the conversion of the eunuch was significant in reaching out to heathen nations of the world with the gospel message.

Question 1: *What is the significance of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch in relation to the commission given by Christ?*

Ethiopia in the context of our lesson today refers to a country then located south of Egypt, and extending to parts of the present day Sudan in Africa. The word "eunuch" was an official title of persons who held important stewardship position for the rulers of those lands where such titles were in use at that time.

SUBMISSIVENESS OF TRUE SERVANTS TO DIVINE PERSPECTIVE (Acts 8:26; 16:4-12; 2 Corinthians 10:6; Mark 5:1-20; Acts 10:9-48; John 4:1-30; Matthew 18:12-14; Psalm 68:31).

"And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert" (verse 26). Philip's prompt and hearty obedience is a challenging example in Christian submission to the will of God. It is logical to infer that it must have been such yieldedness and selfless obedience that made possible the Samaritan revival that now forms the background of the divine directive. Unquestioning obedience to the Lord is the secret of successful soul-winning and church planting. We find such willingness to submerge natural or expected course of action to divine will when apostle Paul and his team abandoned a growing gospel campaign in Asia, to venture into a hitherto unknown Macedonia, after **"assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them"** (Acts 16:10).

For effective outreach with the gospel message, believers are expected to surrender their will to God. If sinners are to be reached with the message of salvation, we must be willing to obey at all times when the Lord instructs us through His Spirit to reach out. Submission to God's will brings about salvation of souls. We must not allow anything to pose a threat or hindrance to taking the

gospel message to sinners wherever they live. We must not wait for sinners to come to church before we show them the way of salvation.

Question 2: *Why is it important to obey divine instruction however seemingly difficult or inconvenient?*

Philip's experience shows that it is only as we obey present revelation of the will of God that fuller revelation will be given to us. For Philip, it was not initially revealed to him that the eunuch of Ethiopia, a possible future seed for the evangelization of a heathen nation, was the objective of the directive. A later and more definite command to "**Go near and join thyself to this chariot**" could not have been given if the initial "**Arise and go towards the South**" was not obeyed. We should note however that God's initial revelation would always contain enough specifics to enable us understand what we are required to do. In our daily walk with God, we must patiently follow His divine directive and will for our lives even when we do not understand why He is leading us in that particular direction. This precept applies not only to soul-winning and ministry but also to other areas of decision making, such as marriage, choice of career, business decisions etc. We must pray and search the scripture for divine guidance and directive without a pre-determined mindset. It is important to note that the wisdom of obedience to God's directive is often made manifest after our obedience is fulfilled.

Question 3: *From the case of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, how much value does God place on a soul?*

Though the reason for the directive to Philip was not made known to him at first, it became manifest at the end. It shows how much God is concerned even for a single soul in need of salvation. Our Lord Jesus Christ once left a busy, crowded city to cross a tempestuous sea in order to deliver a lonely demoniac who became the means of great spiritual awakening in Decapolis (Mark 5:1-20). Peter was also sent from a large port city of Joppa, where he could preach to people from different parts of the world to a Roman centurion and his household (Acts 10:9-48). Also, in consideration of a single Samaritan woman, the Lord had to go through Samaria on His way to Galilee from Judea (John 4:1-42). Indeed, it was to teach us how highly heaven values the salvation of a single soul (Matthew 18:12-14). Had Philip not been obedient to the divine commission he would never have known that a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority was the target of the heavenly directive. Second, the eunuch was next in command to the queen of Ethiopia and therefore the conversion of such a man would normally exert positive influence in that nation. Thus, it was not just the salvation of one soul that was in view. Third, the prophecy of the scripture that "**Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God**" must be fulfilled. Philip's experience shows that God's care for the souls of men is universal.

THE UNIVERSAL NEED FOR THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST (Ezekiel 18:4; Romans 3:20; Genesis 12:3; Luke 2:10; Leviticus 24:22; 24:16; Acts 10:34-35).

The immediate singular objective of Philip's commission was the Ethiopian eunuch. God, by withdrawing Philip from a blossoming Samaritan field to reach one Ethiopian is an eloquent declaration of the universality of His love and concern for the souls of men, wherever they are found. **"Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die"** (Ezekiel 18:4).

The universality of God's standard and will for man's salvation is expressed in many Scriptures. The apostle Paul wrote that **"it is one God which shall justify the circumcision (the Jews) by faith and the uncircumcision (the Gentiles) through faith."** When God called Abraham, He promised that **"in thee (Abraham) shall all families of the earth be blessed"** (Genesis 12:3). The angel that announced the birth of Christ said, **"Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people"** (Luke 2:10). In the application of the law God commanded, **"Ye shall have one manner of law, as well for the stranger, as for one of your own country: for I am the Lord your God"** (Leviticus 24:22).

God, from the beginning intended salvation for all men through Christ. **"That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his (God's) promises in Christ by the gospel"** was a mystery **"which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men (but was later) revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit"** (Ephesians 3:6,5). While Apostle Peter held tenaciously to his old notions, God enlightened him when He sent him to Cornelius, a Roman centurion and his household and baptized them in the Holy Ghost in his presence. Learning his lesson first hand, **"Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him"** (Acts 10: 34,35).

Question 4: *How can believers reach highly placed persons like the Ethiopian eunuch in our society with the gospel today?*

The Ethiopian eunuch was not only a Gentile but a prince of considerable political status. Neither the Spirit of God nor Philip held back from him because of his high position and office. We are reminded that the rich and influential people in our society also are in need of Christ's redemption. They are just as far from the kingdom of God as the ordinary people. Wise and purposeful obedience to the great commission demands that we not only preach to highly placed persons but that special programmes be designed to reach them. This target approach should not only reflect upon the design of outreach programme but also in the method of the follow-up and discipling process. When the Lord called simple fishermen to discipleship (Matthew 4:18-20), He also called Matthew (Levi), a wealthy publican (Matthew 9:9,10). Therefore, deliberate and purposeful outreach programmes should be designed for the wealthy, the influential as well as for the poor.

INCLINATION OF THE SOUL THAT WILL FIND CHRIST (Acts 8:30; 1 Timothy 2:4; Mark 8:36-37).

"And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest?" From the evidence of the

Scripture, it is obvious that in God's plan of redemption, neither colour, economic status nor background is a condition for the salvation of any soul. This is why He "**will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth**" 1 Timothy 2:4). The Ethiopian eunuch was neither favoured nor discriminated against because of his race or position. However, we find in him certain inclinations which predisposed him to God's favour, mercy and salvation.

Question 5: *What are the attributes in the Ethiopian that predisposed him to God's mercy and salvation?*

One, we find in the Ethiopian eunuch the mind of a diligent seeker after God. God always rewards "**Them that diligently seek him**" (Hebrews 11:6). This made the Ethiopian eunuch to travel about one thousand two hundred miles in search of spiritual knowledge. Two, he was of a teachable spirit, eager to learn and willing to be instructed even by a man below his social status. Three, he encouraged the preacher by his words and actions. "**And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him**" (verse 31). Four, the Ethiopian eunuch had his priorities right. Though a man of high rank, the care of his own soul was uppermost in his mind. Five, he never manifested shame in wanting to learn about Christ even in the presence of his entourage. "**And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.**"

THE ESSENTIAL IRREPLACEABLE AND UNCHANGING GOSPEL (Matthew 5:6; Acts 4:12; John 14:6).

Preachers and ministers of God must exercise caution in presenting the gospel message to their congregation and sinners. There cannot be any other message to reconcile lost men with God other than the gospel (Acts 4:12). The subject of the gospel message is Christ and His work of atonement on the cross at Calvary. If the believer will make any impact and be effective in winning lost souls to Christ today, he must be faithful in presenting Christ to the people (1 Timothy 1:15). There is need for believers to understand that it is the pure gospel preached in the power of the Spirit that brings conviction and conversion to sinners. It is however important to note that the message of salvation must be clearly presented for hearers to respond appropriately.

Question 6: *Based on Philip's message to the Ethiopian eunuch, what do you consider to be the essentials of a gospel message?*

Philip's message was based on the passage in Isaiah which centered on Christ's humiliation, suffering and the death for the redemption of mankind. Today, every earnest seeker after God must have the same Jesus preached to him, to enable him find God. It is our duty to direct others to the way of salvation just like Philip did to the eunuch.

As soon as he was saved, the Ethiopian eunuch requested to be baptized. Philip's prompt response to his demand teaches us the qualification for water baptism – repentance. Those give their lives to Christ must, as soon as possible submit to water baptism as provided for in the scriptures.

It is however important to stress that water baptism is one of the most misconstrued teachings by contemporary preachers. Some, believe that it is not necessary because of its abuse by nominal Christians while others claim that without water baptism, one cannot be saved. In the middle is yet another group that believes that, though it is necessary, it must be administered in the name of Jesus only. All of these notions are wrong because Jesus Christ commanded that water baptism should be done in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost (Matthew 28:19). Doing otherwise is to disobey the Lord. Water baptism is done by immersion in water once and not thrice. Through it, we identify with Christ's burial, death and resurrection in newness of life. The ordinance is for those who have fully repented of their sins (Acts 2:38). This also confirms that only adults who can exercise faith to believe can be baptized (Mark 16:16).

Finally, to win others to Christ, our message must contain the essentials which are found in Philip's message to the eunuch. Among other things, Philip emphasized Christ's divinity, virgin birth, substitutionary death for all men, His resurrection and second coming to judge the world in righteousness. These are the unchanging truths about Christ which when received with all our hearts and confessed with our mouth bring salvation and qualifies us for the kingdom of heaven.

LESSON 462

CONVERSION OF SAUL

MEMORY VERSE: “Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting” (1 Timothy 1:16).

TEXT: ACTS 9:1-31

The conversion of Saul marked an important milestone in the growth and development of the early church. Before his conversion, Saul was not just a passive sinner, but a most active and deliberate persecutor of Christ and His people. That such an outrageous and injurious persecutor would ever come to know the Lord and preach the same gospel which he once destroyed is not only a reason to appreciate the love of God but also His omnipotence. Described as a “young man”, his name is first mentioned in a cruel and evil act namely, the martyrdom of Stephen which he masterminded (Acts 7:58). To think that notorious sinners whose names are synonymous with evil in our communities cannot be forgiven and genuinely saved smacks of ignorance of the power of God’s grace, love and will. Concerning the violent and non-violent sinners, the scripture clearly states that God is “**not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance**”. The conversion of Saul shows indeed that “**the grace of our Lord was (and still is) exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus**” (1 Timothy 1: 14). As we shall see in this study, it was Saul’s genuine conversion that qualified him for service in the kingdom and made him a minister of the gospel to the Gentiles that were afar off, even “**unto the uttermost part of the earth**”.

Question 1: *How can a sinner become useful in the hand of God?*

SAUL: PERSECUTOR OF CHRIST’S CHURCH (Acts 9:1,2; 7:58; 8:1; 26:9-11; 7:58; 22:6; 26:12; 1 Corinthians 15:8,9; John 16:2,3; Titus 1:15).

The life of Saul before his conversion shows how dangerous an unconverted religious man can be. Though born a Roman citizen in the Greek city of Tarsus in Asia Minor, he was a Pharisee by birth and creed (Acts 23:5,6). His strict religious training under Gamaliel, a notable and celebrated Jewish Rabbi in Jerusalem made him versatile in the Jewish law and religion (Philippians 3:5; Acts 22:3). He was learned but awfully ignorant of the way of God. Before he was converted, Saul, like many religious professors today, claimed he had “**a good conscience**” while persecuting the church of Christ. Many sinners in their ignorance still hold to religious creeds and rites as evidence of their knowledge of God. But the scripture affirms that “**whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him**” (1 John 3:6). In pursuit of his self-assigned commission of persecution, Saul waged a savage and unrelenting campaign against the early church. Apart from standing guard over the clothes of the murderers of Stephen (Acts 7:58; 8:1), he also armed himself with authority from the chief priest to imprison Christians in Jerusalem and punish those he found in the synagogues. The bile of Saul’s bitterness against the church spilled over even to foreign cities such as Damascus. One cannot but wonder how he

carried out a cause so wicked, bloody and unjustified with such great passion. The practice of religion with zeal and passion without genuine conversion is filthy in the sight of God. For a man who witnessed the sobering spectacle of dying Stephen intercede for his murderers, and yet step up his fury against the church speaks much of the inadequacy of his moral direction. It is a clear warning to us to always examine the things we do or allow in the light of the word of God than with our own conscience, for **“God is greater than our heart”** (1 John 3:20). The Lord Jesus Christ underlined the danger of reliance upon even a “religious” conscience when he taught, **“They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea the time cometh that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you because they have not known the Father nor me”** (John 16:2,3). Every sinner’s conscience is defiled and therefore cannot be trusted to please God always (Titus 1:15). Rather than rely upon a defiled conscience as did Saul, the sinner should repent of his own ways and allow **“the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”** (Hebrews 9:13,14).

Spiritual ignorance and unbelief describe the lifestyle of religious sinners. Referring to his past sinful life after his conversion, Paul revealed that he was a **“blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief”** (1 Timothy 1:13). Every sinner’s life is injurious to himself and people around him, no matter how cultured and polished. This is because his thoughts, feelings, desires and aspirations are sinful.

SAUL: PERSONAL ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST AND CONVERSION (Acts 9:3-9; 26:11-15; 4:12; 2 Corinthians 5:7; Matthew 25:40; Luke 6:46; Hebrew 5:9; Acts 8:3; 1 Timothy 1:13).

“And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” (Acts 9:3,4). This sudden encounter with Christ on his (Saul’s) way to Damascus marked the great change in his life. It was indeed a change most profound. The light which enveloped Saul and his co-travellers was not ordinary. Its brilliance overpowered the brightness of the noonday. In that light, he had a vision of Christ, heard His voice for the first time. Barnabas was to declare later to other apostles **“how that he (Saul) had seen the Lord in the way”** (verse 27). Saul himself (later called Paul) said concerning the Damascus road encounter that, **“And last of all he was seen of me”** (1 Corinthians 15:8). The sum total of all he experienced and heard on that road was his conversion and transformation.

Question 2: *What is conversion, and how can the sinner be converted?*

Conversion can be described as a turning around from self and Satan to God. It can also be described as a turning from darkness to light, from unbelief to faith and reliance upon God. It can also be defined as **“turning from idols** (of whatever form) **unto the living God”**. It is characterized by a change of attitude, disposition, lifestyle to the glory of God and obedience of the faith that is in Christ. In a real sense, conversion can be seen as a return to God’s original

purpose for man's creation. For Saul, this definition was practically expressed in the change it brought to his life and character. The testimony of his conversion which he often mentioned in his epistles is very clear. He "**who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor and injurious...**" and confessed that "**beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it**" declared after his conversion that "**for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain**" (1 Timothy 1:13; Galatians 1:13; Philippians 1:21). Some professing believers do not have this kind of testimony today. They tell stories of their affiliation with the church or change of names. Conversion is possible only through repentance from sin and faith in Jesus Christ.

Saul's attitude and behaviour after his encounter with Christ provide evidence of his conversion and salvation. Truly, "**if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new**". His new attitude and direction were manifested in the following: (i) Whereas he, in the past, thought that by persecuting Christians he was doing service to God, he now realized his ignorance and foolishness. This teaches us that in man's spiritual blindness and ignorance, he often injures the very cause he wishes to promote. (ii) His attitude and disposition towards Christ changed dramatically. Whereas he was before a blasphemer, he now called Christ Lord with prompt obedience to His word.

(iii) He expressed by word and deed a total resignation to the will of Christ as summed up in his word, "**Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?**" (iv) He signified a readiness henceforth to be led and directed by Christ. (v) He sealed his newness of life and character with prompt and practical obedience. When the Lord commanded, "**Arise and go into the city and it shall be told thee what thou must do**", he did just that and promptly.

Question 3: Enumerate briefly the proofs of Saul's conversion.

Saul's changed life contrasts sharply with the attitude of some who claim to be born again. They neither deliberately seek the knowledge of God's will nor take heed to the word of God when it is read and explained. When they receive clear and express command from the word of God, they subject it to modifications to suite their will. To such, the Lord asks a heart searching question, "**Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him**" (verse 29). As his subsequent testimonies show, none of the things he suffered for Christ moved him from his initial steadfastness and consecration to Christ.

Paul, relating this experience later repeated Christ's commission to him saying, "**for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, 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**". He added his response to Christ's commission and purpose of his conversion. He declared that "**I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God,**

and do works meet for repentance". What the world waits for now is the testimony of the believer's obedience to the great commission the way the early believers who truly believed did.

The believer is saved to serve God in soul-winning and must be more zealous than religious fanatics who have a commission from Satan to waste the church of God. Powerful praying and preaching can still make another Saul a preacher of the gospel as Christ is still the same yesterday, today and forever.

LESSON 463

DORCAS RAISED TO LIFE

MEMORY VERSE: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father” (John 14:12).

TEXT: Acts 9:32-43

Our text records another of Peter’s many exploits through the Holy Ghost. It would be recalled that since Pentecost, most of the references to this apostle have been linked to one notable deed or another. This is reminiscent of the ministry of our Lord Jesus who was anointed with the Holy Ghost and power, who went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil (Acts 10:38). These exploits are in consonance with God’s plan that Christ’s ministry should continue through His disciples. The resurrection of Christ is a proof that death did not terminate His mission on earth. Instead, it opened a new window and a greater avenue to reach this dying world with the saving gospel of Christ and ensures that God’s programme for the world is fulfilled.

The passage opens with Peter passing “**throughout all quarters**”. Obviously, he had been engaged in the business of preaching, exhorting and strengthening the disciples. By this he earnestly proved his renewed love for Christ by taking heed to the Master’s parting instruction to him to “**feed my lambs....**” In like manner, every believer should show convincing love to the Lord by obeying His command to go and preach, teach and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18,19; Mark 16:15). We should be diligent to fulfil the ministry He has committed into our hands (John 21:15-17; Colossians 4:17). From Peter’s example, neither persecution nor incarceration should deter any believer from seriously launching into the work of evangelization. As leaders in the early church committed themselves to the pulpit and members who were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the gospel, the contemporary church cannot afford to be less committed. The dedication and devotion of the early church should challenge us to be more committed to this all-important engagement. Two, Peter here proved faithful to their earlier pledge to give themselves to prayer and ministry of the word (Acts 6:4). This challenges us to see to our vows and pledges to the Lord both in material and ministerial matters. Three, as a minister with oversight responsibilities to God’s people, Peter travelled from place to place exhorting and strengthening the brethren to continue in the faith. Those in a similar capacity should ensure they do not fail to see to the welfare of the churches under them. It was in the course of this conscientious ministry of serving the body of Christ and reaching the world for the Lord that “**...he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda**”. There he healed Aeneas, a man that was sick of palsy or paralysis. From there he was called to Joppa where he raised dead Dorcas back to life.

THE PURPOSE OF MIRACLES (Acts 9:32-35,42; 3:1-17; Mark 5:22,35-42; Luke 13:11-17).

Two distinct miracles are recorded in our text. First, the healing of a paralyzed man, an incident which has antecedents in the ministry of our Lord

Jesus Christ. The second, which is the focus of this study is the raising of Dorcas to life. This was the first time an apostle would raise the dead. Raising the dead was not a matter of routine. For instance, before this time, Stephen had been stoned to death and neither Peter nor any of the other apostles attempted to raise him back to life. Perhaps, they were not so led of the Spirit. In that case, it was clear that the deacon had finished his work on earth, and had been accepted back home by the Lord he so loved and served. However, the case of Dorcas was different. Operating under the influence of the Holy Spirit, Peter felt like his Master in the case of Jairus' daughter (Luke 8:52) that the beloved sister Dorcas was merely sleeping. So he acted in a manner similar to the Lord's, sent everyone out, and commanded Dorcas to "**arise**". It is worthy of note that he had a similar result as the Lord.

Question 1: *What can we deduce from the incident of Dorcas' death and the fact of her resurrection?*

"And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died..." (Acts 9:37). The scripture did not indicate the name or nature of Dorcas' sickness. Yet this did not preclude the possibility of divine intervention before her demise. God, in His wisdom allowed this incident, not because He could not prevent it but obviously that His name might be glorified. And such is the wisdom of God which cannot be faulted by man. He permitted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to be cast into the furnace of fire before He delivered them. Daniel was thrown into the den of lions so that His power over the lions could be demonstrated. Lazarus fell sick and died before the Lord Jesus Christ raised him back to life. Therefore, when God permits some incidents to happen in our lives, rather than question Him, we may as well wait to see His design and glory in them.

Question 2: *What should be our attitude to life?*

It is gratifying that the coming of Peter made the difference. This is as a result of the influence of the Holy Spirit in his life. It underscores the importance of being filled with the Spirit of God. He alone knows all things. This miracle proves that God's intervention in any matter involving any of His saints cannot be too late. Whether the required benefit comes early or late by human reckoning, God has a purpose for the time He chooses to act.

Question 3: *What is the purpose of miracles in Christian ministry today?*

As was the case of Dorcas' resurrection, the purposes of miracles are many. First, to prove that God is in control and determines what happens and does not happen. Second, to reverse the effect of Satan's work on an individual or a situation; to defeat his plans and to destroy his works (Luke 13:11-17). Third, it is to prove with indisputable finality that with God, nothing is impossible (Luke 1:37; John 11:14,15). Fourth, they are meant to prove the presence of the Lord with His ministers (Mark 16:20). Fifth, it is to reveal the minister God approves so as to protect the sincere seeker from possible deceit (Exodus 8:19; Jeremiah 28:1-17; Luke 11:20). Sixth, miracles are meant to facilitate faith, such that the direct beneficiaries or witnesses may be encouraged to believe in the true God.

Seventh, they are meant to glorify God, not to celebrate the recipient or deify the miracle worker. Those involved in the miracle ministry must therefore ensure that their emphasis is to glorify God and draw men's hearts to Christ (Acts 9:35,42; 3:11-16; 8:11-15). As Dorcas' life glorified God, even so did her resurrection from death.

THE PERSONALITY OF DORCAS (Acts 9:36-39; Ephesians 4:1; Deuteronomy 15:11; Proverbs 19:17; Hebrews 13:16)

Ordinarily, Dorcas in Greek or Tabitha in Syriac means "deer" - a graceful quick running creature. This woman lived up to her name because God's grace was clearly manifest in her life. How Christians ought to adorn the name of Christ. The quality of a Christian's lifestyle is the acid test of the authenticity of his or her conversion. It is incongruous to claim relationship with Christ without corresponding display of Christlikeness. **"Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance..." "They which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men"** (Luke 3:8,11).

Question 4: *What challenge does Dorcas' life present to contemporary Christians?*

A genuine Christian ought to lead a life of total conformity to Christ's command. **"...And this woman was full of good works and almsdeed... and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them"** (Acts 9:36,39). Whether sewing was her vocation or pastime, Dorcas teaches believers to devote their skills and aptitudes to the glory of God by using them to impact positively on others. The believer should do as much good to as many people as possible, especially those of the household of faith (Galatians 6:10). Two, we ought to constantly relieve the indigent and underprivileged. The presence of the poor in a Christian assembly is an opportunity to minister to the Lord by showing kindness to them. Three, the believers need to constantly live in consciousness of the fact that any service or kindness done to a redeemed soul finds direct rebound on the person of the Redeemer. On the one hand, God is well pleased with such efforts as great commendation and rewards await Christians who are engaged therein. On the other, terrible consequences await those who neglect this practical aspect of the Christian faith (Matthew 25:31-46). Though she died, her works lived on.

PARTAKING IN THE MIRACLE MINISTRY (Acts 9:34; 14:8-10; Matthew 7:7-9; Mark 11:22-24).

That the two separate miracles recorded in our text were performed on people of different genders assure everyone that the God of miracles is no respecter of persons. He blesses both male and female, young and old, poor or rich. Instances of God's dealings with people in similar conditions like Hannah and Abraham, Jairus and the Syrophenician woman, Jabez and the daughters of Zelophehad, are testimonies that God answers prayers irrespective of the

personality involved provided His conditions are met. Everyone can benefit from the miracle ministry.

Question 5: What are the conditions for partaking in the miracle ministry?

Either as beneficiary or minister, the conditions for partaking in the miracle ministry are basically the same. First, we must. **“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth...”** (Matthew 7:7). Asking necessarily implies praying. Merely wishing or day-dreaming will not bring the desired result. Prayer is talking to God on a matter that either affects or interests one. It means making request for a particular need from God. It could also be on behalf of another person. However, such request must agree with the promise of God, otherwise He is not obliged to answer. **“Ye lust, and have not: ye... desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts”** (James 4:2-3). Our asking must be in line with God’s will and Word.

The second requirement is faith. Faith in God’s ability and anticipation of answers to our request are important to receiving from God. It also implies trust in His goodness and unfailing promise to the sincere seeker. **“...Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you... What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them”** (Mark 11:22-24). The third condition is to confess His ability to answer. The sinner must confess Christ as Saviour. Likewise, the saint must confess what the Scripture says about him or her.

However, any believer who desires to be God’s agent in the miracle ministry must pattern his life after the Lord’s. He must be a crucified vessel who is interested in God’s glory alone. An individual who wants to share in God’s glory would not go far in the miracle ministry. Two, he must lead a consistently holy life both in his private and public life. Three, he must seek to be filled with the Holy Ghost and partner with Him in every endeavour. Four, he must be sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s leading and submissive to His directive. He cannot afford to pray in order to make a show of his gift. Five, as clearly displayed in Peter’s life, there must be an evident commitment to the evangelization project. This is because the miracle ministry is a weapon of witnessing to the world and drawing men’s souls to Christ.

PASSION OF CHRIST’S DISCIPLES (Acts 9:43; 18:7-11)

Consequent upon the positive response of faith to Dorcas’ resurrection, Peter decided to tarry in the city of Joppa **“many days”**. His objective was obviously to make Christ known and get the new converts established in the Lord, teach them the way of the Lord more perfectly, counsel where necessary and get them committed to the Master’s Commission. These ought to be the focus of every true minister of the cross.

THE VISIONS OF CORNELIUS AND PETER

MEMORY VERSE: “**And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth**” (Isaiah 49:6).

TEXT: ACTS 10:1-22

Today's text marks a turning point in the soul-winning work of the early church. Contrary to Christ's express command to preach the gospel to every creature, the apostles had for no justifiable reason restricted themselves to ministering among the people of the Hebrew stock both at home and elsewhere. Those early believers had misconceived the benefits of the gospel as an exclusive preserve of the tribes of Israel. Despite the record of great exploits in the first nine chapters of Acts, the achievements fell far below the church's potential. From this point on however, this was to change for the better. Our text records God's schemes for the conversion of the first Gentile household. In the account, the Lord gave two complementary visions to two representatives of the two major divides - Jews and Gentiles.

Question 1: *Why were the visions significant?*

It is interesting to note that though persecution was responsible for the spread of the gospel to Samaria, it was divine directive that gave birth to the Gentile church. This shows the great concern of God for all His human creatures, including non-Hebrews. The salvation of the Gentiles was not a historic accident as some infidels erroneously suppose. Rather, it is a significant part of God's project for this dispensation. He therefore decided to jolt the church to action, particularly in respect of the extension of the privileges of salvation to the Gentiles through Peter's vision. Besides, God does prompt His ministers to jettison long held opinions which may run contrary to divine programme of rescuing the perishing regardless of tribe or race. It is clear from the foregoing that God directs His people in the evangelization of the world. As co-labourers with God, we need then to forsake tribal sentiments that reduce our usefulness in the hands of God. Sinners need to rejoice in the impartiality of God and embrace the universal gospel and be saved from sin like Cornelius and his household. God has promised to save everyone who penitently prays to him. They would find that God is more than eager to respond to the spiritual needs of sincere seekers like Cornelius.

CHARACTER AND CONVICTION OF CORNELIUS (Acts 10:1-2; Psalm 103:13; Proverbs 3:7; Ecclesiastes 12:13; John 9:31; Romans 8:3; Hebrews 11:28; 1 John 3:17,18).

“There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, A devout man, and one that feared God...” (Acts 10:1,2). As a Roman military officer with command over a hundred Italian soldiers, Cornelius wielded considerable authority in Caesarea. None of

the soldiers under him could challenge, refuse or altar his order (Matthew 8:9). Yet, he was convinced that he too was subject to God. This state of his heart guided his whole outlook on life so much that he was consistently God-fearing. A challenge from this is that one should not allow any privilege becloud his need to humbly recognize the superior claims of God on his person. No matter one's secular status, he should always live in the consciousness of the fact that the Lord who places one in a position of power or influence expects that the beneficiary of such favours be subject to His overriding purpose.

Question 2: How does Cornelius' character challenge the contemporary Christian?

“A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always” (Acts 10:2).

Serving within Israeli territory, he would no doubt have had contact with the notion of the true God, His worship and His demands. So, he lived in the light of the truth he had received. Again, his example and influence on his household should challenge those who though profess to love God, do not correct the ungodly comportment of their wives, children and domestic helps. He and his household have evidently heard stories about the life, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ (verses 36-40). In spite of the possibility of conflicting superior claims between Christianity and Judaism in the territory at that time, his pattern of life indisputably reveals his reverence for God. As a Gentile, he had a basic belief in the tenets of godliness and lived by them. This was even before Peter's declaration of the gospel message and their salvation experience. If Cornelius could be so God-fearing, generous, prayerful and devoted, and was still instructed by God to send for Peter to preach salvation message to them, religious people of this world need to obey the same instruction for their salvation. Believers who are less devoted have cause to pray for renewal of their spiritual life.

THE CONDITION AND VISION OF CORNELIUS (Acts 10:3-6; 4:12; 11:13,14; Colossians 2:18)

“He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying...” (Acts 10:3). In response to his soul's thirst and continual prayer, God gave a vision to assure him that his good works and prayer had come up for a memorial before Him (verse 4). The vision gave a clear directive to send for Peter. In addition, it gave an unmistakable description of Peter's residence. It also gave a concise declaration of the purpose of the directive: **“he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do”** (verse 6). This clearly indicates the major content of the centurion's prayers all the while. He had been asking for divine guidance on the kind of faith that is acceptable to God. Certainly, any form of idolatry was out of the question. His confusion had to do with how to make the right choice between the age-long religious practices of Judaism and the fledging new faith of Christianity. He needed divine guidance on whether to follow the old priestly system of animal sacrifices or to align with the faith being propagated by the apostles and leaders of the church

who minister in the power of the Holy Ghost. Seeing his earnestness, the Lord decided to come to his aid through a vision.

Question 3: *What can the contemporary believer deduce from the vision of Cornelius?*

Valuable lessons can be learnt from this vision. One, it shows that in situations of personal confusion, the believer can pray like David, **“Lead me, O LORD, in thy righteousness... make my way straight before my face”** (Psalm 5:8). In keeping with His faithfulness to His promise, God will instruct, teach and guide (Psalm 32:8). Two, it proves that indeed God is not willing that any sincere seeker should perish. **“For the Lord taketh pleasure in his people: he will beautify the meek with salvation”** (Psalm 149:4). Three, it confirms the fact that angels are messengers of God to men. Though they appreciate and rejoice in the knowledge of Christ’s messiahship in whose name alone men must be saved, they do not have the mandate to preach it among mortals, yet. This exclusive privilege therefore places an equally extensive responsibility on believers. Five, Cornelius was God-fearing but not a Christian as yet. The command that he should send for Peter, a preacher of Christ shows that in the reckoning of heaven, there is no acceptable alternative to salvation. Christ alone is the way as well as the gate into the kingdom. No other creed or religion can substitute for His atoning sacrifice on the cross. Therefore, it is wisdom for anyone in any Christ-less religion to reconsider his stand in the light of a painful disappointment in eternity.

COMPLIANCE OF CORNELIUS TO DIVINE DIRECTIVE (Acts 10:7,8; Genesis 19:15-19; 22:1-3; Luke 19:5-10; Galatians 1:15,16).

“And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants... And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa” (Acts 10:7,8).

Question 4: *What can the believer learn from the compliance of Cornelius?*

The centurion was prompt in his compliance. Like Abraham, long before Cornelius did not deliberate the matter with any mortal before he obeyed the divine command. So should believers ensure complete compliance with God’s directives. **“I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments”** (Psalm 119:60). Two, his choice of three of his most trusted and devout men challenges the contemporary believer to deploy the best of our human and material resources to the course of obeying divine commands. Three, the manner in which he narrated the message to the servants should remind the believer not to either embellish or diminish from the word of God (Deuteronomy 4:2; Revelation 22:18). Four, Cornelius’ evaluation of these servants and the sincerity with which they carried out the assignment should challenge Christians in any employment or engagement to be faithful and dependable. Moreover, as we serve the Lord, we should realize that faithfulness befits our calling. **“Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful”** (1 Corinthians 4:1,2).

CONSEQUENCE OF PETER'S VISION (Acts 10:9-22; 11:1-12; Hebrews 8:6,7; 10:7-14; 2 Corinthians 3:1-11).

As Cornelius' servants approached Peter's residence, the Lord arranged that the apostle fall into a trance in which he saw a "...**great sheet ...wherein were all manner of four footed beasts... wild beasts, creeping things, and fowls of the air**" (verses 11,12). As a faithful Hebrew who was versed in the laws of Moses, the suggestion to kill and eat the unclean content of the descended sheet was expectedly negative. However, the divine correction of his resistance and trice repetition of the vision sent the apostle into serious thinking as to the significance of the vision. His dilemma was how he could remain a faithful Hebrew and at the same time obey a command that was expressly contrary to the laws of Moses. He was yet to fully realize that as a New Testament minister, he was now under a new covenant which was higher and better than the former.

"While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them. Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius..." (Acts 10:19,20). Peter's immediate response to the Spirit's leading in spite of his initial dogged resistance teaches the believer to always submit to the will of God no matter how long any contrary opinion might have been held.

Question 5: *What is the outcome of Peter's vision?*

One of the heart-warming results of this vision was that it helped to remove the resistance of the Hebrew Christians to reach people of other nationalities with Christ's gospel of salvation. It opened the way for the Gentiles to come into the church. The erstwhile all-Hebrew church was thenceforth to welcome faithful people of every nationality. It signified the acceptance of all human creatures into the spiritual tabernacle of the Creator. It proves that God is as much the heavenly Father of the Jews as He is of the Gentiles. It has also led to the expansion of the gospel work to regions hitherto unreached, thus prosecuting the Lord's mandate to witness to the uttermost parts of the earth.

In conclusion, the message of God to Peter applies to the believer today and requires obedient response from every believer. God is willing to save the sinner. But he must turn away from sin and exercise faith in Christ's sacrifice to be able to receive the experience of salvation. This was the essential content of Peter's message right from the time the Holy Ghost descended on the early church and he conveyed same to Cornelius and his household.

LESSON 465

CORNELIUS AND HIS HOUSEHOLD RECEIVE CHRIST

MEMORY VERSE: “**And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house**” (Acts 16:30,31).

TEXT: ACTS 10:23-48

The tenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostle details how the gospel began to spread to “**the uttermost part of the earth**” for the salvation of the Gentiles. Christ’s commission to believers to “**go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature**” (Mark 16:15) was being fulfilled. Whereas the gospel had been largely restricted in its outreach to the precincts of Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, its course was now being changed to reach sinners in “**the uttermost part of the earth.**” Beginning with Cornelius and his household, the gospel was now available for and accessible to everyone in “**all nations**”. This account marked the beginning of an open door for the gospel unto the Gentiles. The gospel is never meant for the Jews only or a select few but for all so that everyone who have the privilege of hearing it can be saved. Seeing the Jewish believers would not take the initiative to reach out to their Gentile counterparts because of man-made rules, God wielded His supernatural power to ensure that Gentile sinners were saved by all means.

Carnal pride that existed in the early days of the church had negatively affected the outreach of the Jews towards the Gentiles. In fact, prior to the birth of the church, there was little or no interaction between the two. Jews considered the Gentiles as pagans and had nothing but contempt for them. But as believers in Christ’s church, we have to thoroughly examine ourselves and see that we remove every restraint that has hindered sinners in our neighbourhood and offices from being reached. We must swallow our prides and allow the will of God to have its free course; else, we could be guilty of hindering the spread of the gospel with our man-made traditions that run contrary to the will of God.

Question 1: *Mention some man-made traditions that hinder the spread of the gospel today?*

ABANDONMENT OF NON-ESSENTIAL TRADITIONS (Acts 10:23,26,28,29,9-18; 9:43; Colossians 2:20-23).

The problem of segregation of the Jews from the Gentiles dates back to the era of Judaism. God had designed the exclusiveness for Israel so that they could maintain their holiness. The Jews were thus proud of their law and their adherence to it. This degenerated to poor relationship between the Jews and the Gentiles. While the Jews hated the Gentiles for their idolatry, the Gentiles hated the Jews as enemies of the human race. The contempt of the Gentiles for the Jews was illustrated by Pilate’s dripping sarcasm when he said, “**Am I a Jew?**”

(John 18:35). The same problem can be sensed in the owners of the slave girl possessed by a spirit of divination when they said, **“These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city”** (Acts 16:20).

How sad that the exclusiveness that God had designed for Israel for the purpose of holiness had degenerated to a matter of pride! Even with the birth of the church, it was still very difficult for Christians (who were all Jews) to reach out to the Gentiles. It is sad to note that the tradition that a Jew should not associate with a Gentile through social contact was not part of the Old Testament law but a teaching by the rabbis who had made a custom.

In the preceding chapter, Peter had started shedding this rabbinical tradition as he had been a guest in Joppa at the house of **“one Simon a tanner.”** The Jews despised that trade because tanners handled the flesh of dead animals. But Peter stayed in his house for **“many days”**. His prejudices needed to be removed by the Lord because Gentiles like Cornelius had to be reached with the gospel.

Now, Peter was to go to the house of Cornelius to honour an invitation to preach the gospel message to, not just a Gentile but also an officer in the Roman army who wanted to hear the gospel. Peter had never come this far but now he had to. **“Then called he them in, and lodged them....”** We can see the change in Peter’s heart by the way he literally entertained these Gentile guests against every custom and tradition of the Jews, but not against God’s Word.

Peter reached out in love to his Gentile neighbors, in obedience to what God has told him in the trance. It is always interesting for believers to cast off personal or public opinion when it comes to doing God’s will. There should not be room for carnal considerations. Of course, when Cornelius and others got saved, they would be in the most strategic place possible to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth in fulfilment of Christ’s purpose because **“there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus”** (Galatians 3:28).

Question 2: How can believers avoid the traditions in preaching gospel to sinners in their neighbourhoods and places of work?

CORNELIUS: AN EXAMPLE OF A SINCERE SEEKER (Acts 10:24,25,27,30-33; Matthew 7:7-11; Jeremiah 29:13).

Upon Peter’s arrival in Cornelius’ house, he met many people who had gathered, waiting to hear the gospel. It was thus with great sense of expectation that Cornelius waited for Peter’s arrival, along with his friends and relatives. He was not only waiting to hear the gospel, but was willing to get his kindred and friends to hear the gospel. He did not want to enjoy the benefits of grace alone, he wanted his whole circle of acquaintance to also profit from it. Besides, he was not ashamed to invite others to a religious meeting of the most solemn nature. He was **“not ashamed of the gospel of Christ”** (Romans 1:16).

Because he was a sincere seeker of the true salvation, he shelved any secular engagement during the period and was intent on hearing the gospel. Whenever God sees sincerity in the seeker, He does not waste time in attending to them. Likewise, preachers and soul-winners should promptly identify sincere seekers

and give them priority attention. But there is need to wait for the leading of the Spirit of God in discerning who is sincere and who is not.

Note that as God was speaking to Cornelius, He was also speaking to Peter. While Joppa was busy with its trade, and Caesarea with its great shipping interests, God sent His angel to Caesarea, and grants the ecstatic trance in Joppa. They were thus brought together. This provides confirmation because out of the mouth of two or three witnesses the truth is established.

Question 3: *How can a soul-winner identify sincere seekers in his evangelistic outreaches?*

THE GOSPEL: SALVATION THROUGH FAITH (Acts 10:34-43; Matthew 28:18-20; Ephesians 2:8-13; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Romans 4:5-8; 3:21-26; 5:9; 10:9,10).

The gospel is the soul saving message by which God saves us. Peter, now beginning to understand God's impartiality, told his audience, "**Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ**" (Acts 10:34-35). He summed up his message by telling his audience "**that through his name (Jesus) whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.**" Paul, the apostle revealed the gospel to the Corinthians in a capsule form when he said, "**For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures**" (1 Corinthians 15:3,4).

Through the gospel we learn that Christ became the sin-Bearer and "**the propitiation for our sins; and not for our sins only, but for the sins of the whole world**" (1 John 2:2). By His finished work of grace, solution was provided to the problem of sin (Isaiah 44:22).

Although Christ's atonement on the cross guarantees universal provision of salvation for mankind, this can only be appropriated on personal basis through faith in Jesus Christ. This means that the sinner who seeks salvation must take the necessary steps of exercising faith in the blood of Jesus.

Question 4: *What steps should a sinner take to receive salvation?*

DIVINE APPROVAL OF REACHING THE GENTILES WITH THE GOSPEL (Acts 10:44-48; Ephesians 2:11-16; 3:4-6). God is not partial in His dealing with mankind. He saves both Jews and Gentiles by grace and through faith in the blood of Jesus. God broke down the old barriers that separated Jews and Gentiles, making one new entity, the church, consisting of believing Jews and Gentiles.

That the same Spirit's baptism was taking place in the house of a Gentile and to Gentiles present was a great surprise to the Jewish Christians who came with apostle Peter to Cornelius' house. That these Gentiles who were referred to as pagans and despised by the Jews were now being incorporated into the body

of Christ made it clear to the Jews that God was equally interested in saving the Gentile sinners. His design is to build one body comprising Jews and Gentiles.

With Christ's death the veil that made the holy of holies an exclusive place was torn into two (Matthew 27:51), signifying that entry into the holy place had been deregulated so that all may come in. The wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles had been removed. Jesus told His disciples: "**Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature**" (Mark 16:15). He had clearly indicated that fellowship in Christ is wide open to all.

Question 5: *What is the significance of the descent of the Holy Ghost in Cornelius' house?*

LESSONS FROM THE LIFE AND CONVERSION OF CORNELIUS (Acts 10:23-48; 16:31; 17:31; 1 Corinthians 1:18-21; Romans 3:9-23; Isaiah 64:6).

The life and conversion of Cornelius, like a book, is worth studying. There are many principles we can derive from it. In him, we learn that though a man is devout, prayerful and has the best of intentions, he is not saved until he sincerely and consciously surrenders his life to God.

Question 6: *Mention some other lessons from Cornelius' conversion.*

One, Cornelius was a good and devout man, one who feared God, yet his life was incomplete. He yearned for his soul's salvation. Peter had to bring the gospel to him so he could know the truth and be saved. Two, after hearing the word of God, he believed and was baptized. Those who believe the word of God and accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour are saved while those who reject it will perish.

Three, he was liberal, generous and benevolent; he "**gave much alms**" and "**prayed to God always**". Yet these good works could not put his name in the book of life. Four, Cornelius had a measure of righteousness – he was "**a just man, and one that feared God, and of good report**" (Acts 10:22a) but he was not saved. Being well spoken of by family and friends does not merit God's salvation.

However, God remembered and redeemed him. God remembers each one of us because He "**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). This is the only one way to be saved.

Question 7: *What challenge can we receive from Cornelius in the way he gathered his household and friends to hear God's word?*

The challenge from this devout Centurion to believers today is that they should not keep God's goodness to themselves alone. Like Cornelius, we should always make use of every available opportunity to bring the good news to our friends, relatives, co-workers and well-wishers. Secondly, we are not to wait until we know so much of Scriptures before we give someone simple invitation to a Christian gathering. Let us, as Christians employ every opportunity to take the whole gospel to the world while there is time.

LESSON 466

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

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

TEXT: John 1:35-51

The thrust of the text we are considering is the practical demonstration of an effective, easy and exemplary soul-winning strategy. Beginning with John the Baptist’s concise introduction of the Saviour – “**Behold the Lamb of God**”, five different souls, who later became apostles and pillars in the early church, were systematically won to become disciples of Jesus Christ. Andrew, one of the first two disciples who heard John’s timely declaration and became followers of Christ, was able to convince his own brother (Peter) to join him in the decision to become a disciple of the Great Teacher. Interestingly and instructively, Christ Himself was not left out in the application of this reliable strategy. The next day, after Andrew had brought Peter to Him, He won the heart of Philip almost effortlessly. Filled with a strong conviction and overwhelming joy, Philip also was able to convince Nathaniel who was initially cynical and reluctant to heed the divine call. The uniqueness of this string of conversions lies in the peculiarity of the procedure, the simplicity, the effectiveness and the enduring nature of the work done. Although it is relatively easy, the quality of the fruit produced is simply unsurpassable. These basic features make personal evangelism a mandatory, vital and indispensable method of soul-winning for every believer today.

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

Question 1: What does personal evangelism mean?

Personal evangelism is the person-to-person sharing of the good news of salvation, with the aim of leading a sinner to repentance and turning him wholly to God through Jesus Christ. It is the easiest, cheapest and most effective method of evangelism. It cannot be easily outlawed by the bans on public preaching and proclamation that may affect mass form of evangelism. Through it, the seeker’s personal attention is gained, doubts are cleared and the decision made becomes solid and strong. It is the fastest and easiest way of quickly multiplying disciples and reaching any category of individuals in the community.

Personal evangelism is Christ’s mandate to every believer. While on earth, His main focus was to seek and save those who were lost in sin. This was His primary preoccupation, purpose and passion. “**Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work**” (John 4:34). Having paid the greatest price and sacrifice to redeem lost humanity from the bondage of sin and Satan, His parting charge and challenge to every believer is: “**Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature**” (Mark 16:15). The manner and tone of the charge reveals its urgent,

compelling and mandatory nature. Thus, the disciples who heard Jesus giving this charge lived to fulfil it (Mark 16:20). The individual members of the early church also continued in the discharge of this responsibility (Acts 8:4,30-36). Today, no true disciple of Christ will neglect or undermine the mandatory task.

Obedience to the Great Commission is demonstrated by the instrumentality of individual believers reaching out to sinners with the gospel message on a person-to-person basis. This foundational method of soul winning is the attempt on the part of a Christian to show a sinner, from the Word of God, his true state and need (Romans 3:10-23; I Corinthians 6:9,10); the truth of God's judgement and punishment (Ezekiel 18:4; Romans 1:32; Revelation 20:15), God's love resulting in the provision of a Saviour in the person of Jesus Christ (John 3:16; 1:29; Titus 2:11-14) and the requirement of repentance towards God and faith in Christ on the part of the sinner in order to be saved (Matthew 4:17; Luke 13:2,3; Acts 3:19; 17:30; Romans 10:9,10; John 3:15). This must be tactfully concluded with a deliberate effort of leading the sinner to repentance and to accept Christ as his personal Lord and Saviour (John 1:46-51; Acts 8:35-39).

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

There is a great and urgent need today for consecrated Christians to give themselves to the task of personal evangelism. The pitiable conditions and descriptions of the sinners' plight demand that every believer should have an insatiable desire for the salvation of souls. The fact and the reality of Hell as a place of agonising torment and everlasting punishment in unquenchable fire demand that soul-winning should be carried out daily and seriously, and that diligently (Mark 9:43-47; Luke 16:23; 2 Corinthians 5:11). The value of a soul surpasses all the riches of the whole world put together (Matthew 16:26). The precious blood of Christ was shed to secure its redemption (1 Peter 1:18,19).

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

We cannot depend on mass evangelism methods alone to win these people to the Lord. One soul genuinely led to the Lord and saved is better than ten thousand empty professions. If, in a church of a hundred, standing believers can each endeavour to bring a soul to Christ in six months, it means that in one year, there will be four hundred genuine believers in the congregation. Which local congregation today has recorded such a high rate of growth with all the mass programmes? The personal visit of a doctor can never be compared with the general prescription of cure for the general public. The doctor

examines the patient, diagnoses the disease and prescribes the exact remedy. Let us develop the ability of individual effort and strive by all means to win souls by personal evangelism. The seriousness and great concern of God to save sinners from the wrecking influences of sin and its damning consequences is revealed by His solemn charges (2 Timothy 4:1,2; Mark 16:15; Ezekiel 33:11-19) and His involvement in directing soul-winners to souls (Acts 8:26-29; 10:9-20; 16:9). The Lord Jesus Christ gave time and attention to win Philip, Zacchaeus, the Samaritan Woman, the Thief on the cross and others. His desire to save souls made Him to die for the sins of the world (John 1:43; 4:7-28; Luke 19:1-10; 23:39-43; John 3:16).

Question 2: *How can the church leadership motivate members to be diligently involved in personal evangelism?*

Commitment to personal soul-winning is lacking today in most of our congregations. It is therefore pertinent that the church should aim at raising an army of believers who will be addicted to personal evangelism. To achieve this, the leadership of the local church should take the lead and be an example to the flock in this great task (1 Peter 5:3). They should train the people through systematic pulpit teachings, specially organized weekend evangelism seminars and through workshops at both workers' and general retreats. Apart from teaching and training, deliberate efforts should be made to challenge the believers to soul-winning. This can further be achieved through organized weekend evangelism outreach at church level, pairing of believers as evangelism partners in the house fellowship level, the use of Operation Andrew cards periodically and through organized outreaches of evangelism teams. To evaluate the efforts, believers can be made to bring their converts to a specially organized 'Converts Rally Day' where each believer will show his convert, and such convert will be further encouraged to continue in the Christian race.

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

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

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

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

It is essential to note that effective soul-winning has a lot to do with the soul-winner's life. The blind cannot lead the blind (Matthew 15:14). This underscores, first, the necessity of genuine conversion and salvation from sin

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

Fourth, he must be knowledgeable and skilled in the right application of the scriptures (Colossians 3:16; 2 Timothy 2:15; Hosea 4:6). Like an ignorant advocate cannot defend his client in the court of law, a soul-winner who lacks the knowledge of God's Word cannot convince a sinner to accept Christ as his personal Lord and Saviour. Five, he must have a strong conviction about God; the Bible; the indispensability of salvation; the significance of Christ's death and His resurrection; and the consequences of neglecting the call to salvation. In summary, to be effective, the soul-winner needs the compassion of a doctor, the courtesy of a nurse, the conviction of a communist and the commitment of a miner. In addition, he should be bold, courageous, persevering as a good soldier of the cross and patient as a good ambassador of Jesus Christ.

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

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

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

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

Literature method seeks to reach a sinner through the printed work. A Christian tract, magazine, comic or book given out prayerfully, purposefully and passionately can turn a soul to Christ faster than we think. The after-fellowship approach is most appropriate when we want to lead first-timers in our church or in the Home Caring Fellowship to the Lord. It involves expanding on the message he has just heard, applying it and calling him to decision.

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

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

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

To be effective in leading a sinner to conviction and conversion, there are things that must be done. One, like a doctor, diagnose the case with the use of questions to discover the class he belongs to and how best to deal with him. Two, describe the disease. Sin, as a disease of the soul, must be revealed with the help of the scriptures and painted vividly enough that the sinner will discover it in himself apparently (Galatians 5:19-21; I Corinthians 6:9,10). Three, prescribe the remedy. Christ is the remedy for sin. Thus, the soul-winner must exalt Christ so high that the sinner in the pit of sin will be willing to jump at the opportunity and hang on to Him immediately for deliverance (John 12:32; I Timothy 2:5,6; Hebrews 10:19-22). Four, warn him of the danger of delay, and rejecting the truth (Isaiah 1:20; 2 Corinthians 6:2; Proverbs 29:1; Hebrews 4:1-6). Five, urge for an immediate decision. Having made clear the gospel, the soul-winner should encourage the sinner to decide for Christ. If he declares his intention to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, he should be made to pray out in his own words confessing his sins and receiving Christ as Lord and Saviour (1 John 1:9; Romans 10:9,10). Six, anchor him to the Word of God for assurance. Finally, show him how to continue in Christ.

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

However, there are things to avoid in the course of dealing with a soul. Do not exalt self above the sinner, or condemn denominations. Avoid acting victorious or proud when you have scored a point (Matthew 11:29) and do not tell sad stories, but point to Christ (John 3:16; 2 Peter 3:9). Do not multiply texts and illustrations, never be in a hurry, and deal not with more than one at a time. There is need for care when dealing with the opposite sex. Avoid getting into an argument with the seeker. Do not lose your self-control and emotion. Do not tell seekers to think it over; bring him to a decision at once where possible. Do not be discouraged by apparent failure. Often, you are simply another link in the chain of grace that will bring the sinner to Christ (John 4:37,38). As for outlook, do not have bad breath or body odour.

As a further help, the soul-winner needs to be familiar with scriptures that deal with various categories of sinners. This is necessary to meet the sinner at his actual area of need, and to successfully penetrate his heart with the gospel. The various categories of sinners and relevant scriptural passages include: the careless (Luke 14:16; Ezekiel 33:9; Acts 24:25; Hebrews 2:3; 12:25; Isaiah 47:8,9), the deceived (Matthew 24:5; I Corinthians 6:9; 15:33; Galatians 6:7; Ephesians 5:6; 2 Thessalonians 2:3; I John 3:7), the religious (Matthew 7:22, 26; Romans 3:20; 11:6; Ephesians 2:8,9; Titus 3:5; Luke 18:9-14), the confused (John 6:37; 8:36; Jude 24; I Peter 1:5; 2 Timothy 1:12; Philippians 1:6), the

superstitious (Acts 17:22-31; I Samuel 4:3-14; I Kings 20: 23-30; Jeremiah 10:2-13), the excuse-makers (Luke 14:16-24; Matthew 24:24,25; Acts 24:24,25), the ignorant (Hosea 4:6; Acts 17:23; Matthew 15:14; Jeremiah 5:4; Micah 4:12), the anxious (Acts 16:30,31; 2:37; Luke 3:9-14), the backsliders (Hebrews 10:38; 2 Peter 2:20; Revelation 2:4,5; Hosea 6:1-3; Isaiah 55:7), the free thinkers (Psalm 10:4; 14:1; Romans 1:19-26), the objectors (Romans 2:1-6; Ecclesiastes 12:13,14) and the sceptics (Psalms 10:4; 14:1; I John 2:22).

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

LESSON 467

WORLDLINESS AND WORLDLY AMUSEMENTS

MEMORY VERSE: “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:1,2).

TEXT: 1 John 2:15-17

There is a great line of divide across all of humanity, past, present and future. On one side of this divide is the Church, the invisible assembly of all redeemed souls, whose lifestyle, conduct, character, disposition and taste, are fully dictated by Christ. On the other side is the world, the pervasive evil system orchestrated by the devil and easily detected in the taste, lifestyle, character, disposition, language, dressing, amusements and recreation of its followers. Worldliness, therefore, is any kind of conformity with the worldly system, practices, dressing or adornment. There is no meeting point between the world and the Church; they are two irreconcilable systems. The world must not be allowed to come into the Church; but where it has surreptitiously crept in, it must be flushed out. Christ is coming for a pure Church without spot, wrinkle or any such thing. The Church and her entire membership have to be completely free of the worldly value system and tradition. This is why the Bible says: “**Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the father is not in him**”. Worldliness begins in the heart. It is a secret, inward liking and, later, a craving for the fad, fancies and fashions of the world. It finally begins to show forth in the lifestyle of its victim.

Question 1: *What is worldliness and how does it begin?*

When the people of the world (your friends, colleagues, relations, neighbours etc.) dictate and determine your taste in dressing, you are becoming worldly. When your heart begins to yearn after the trends and contemporary vogue in the world, worldliness is setting in. When supposedly Christian marriage attracts all the tradition, style, conduct and showy spirit seen in the marriage of sinners, the world is setting in. And God warns in His Word: “**Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God**” (James 4:4). Neither the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ nor the epistles of the Apostles give licence for the Christian to be worldly, or to associate in any form with the world. The believer must separate himself from the world.

EXPRESSIONS OF WORLTLINESS (1 John 2:15-17; Isaiah 3:16-24; Matthew 24:38)

The Bible draws a picture of the world in its true colour. But more than that, it declares, in many ways and in many places, that it is sensual, devilish,

doomed and distorting. Dressing is one area where worldliness in the heart speaks loudly and clearly. Christians are not to dress like the world does. The spirit that dictates the fashion of the world is that of the devil. It thrives on sinful passions or vices that do not rest until they set the opposite sexes lusting and making them to commit sin. This spirit and the fashions or designs it dictates are a continual constant digression from God, holiness and righteousness.

Adornment copied from the world, which, at least, reflects the pride of life, and the cravings of a carnal spirit are worldly and must, like a plague, be avoided. Such are superfluous home or car decorations, use of beads as those worn by the heathens in primordial days, face powder, artificial hair either as wigs or “attachments” in weaving, pride-induced gold-coated frames for spectacle, and jewelries. Some Christian mothers pierce the ears of their female children. Had it been necessary, God would have done it from heaven. Had it been needful like circumcision, He would have given it like a commandment. One wonders how a Christian mother could watch her daughter being subjected to a painful piercing exercise just to look like the world. A spirit is surely behind this!

Worldliness is also seen in ceremonies. When a marriage is attended by all that goes on in the world – renting; borrowing or hiring of dresses; excessive spending, which, at times, borders on indebtedness; video documenting, especially for motives of pride; immodest dressing; and public dancing – it is worldly. The guiding principle of a Christian is modesty, lowliness. **“Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand”** (Philippians 4:5).

Question 2: *Mention some of the common expressions of worldliness*

Besides the dresses, ceremonies and adornments, there are some assemblies or gatherings that are essentially worldly and sinful. When meetings are held to foster the carnal desires of the flesh, inflame the mind and make it to dance off godly sorrows that are necessary in preparing the heart for the seed of the Word, a Christian must keep away. Whether it is outright disco gatherings or its religious equivalent “praisco”, it is worldly.

A pilgrim to heaven has no business with the conferment of chieftaincy title under whatever guise. The local and tribal ecumenical gathering called “all believers’ meeting”, frequenting barbing salons for games and jokes, as well as tribal meetings need not be touched not even with a ten feet pole. Sincere and serious Christians keep off such gatherings. The environment of such meetings is a fertile ground that the flesh thrives on. Trendy fashions, unspoken competitive social outlook, lust of the eyes and pride of life thrive in these meetings. They cannot help fix the gaze of a Christian heavenward. If anything, it blows cool the steam in the heart of the Christian and quenches the smouldering ‘flame’ in the young believer. **“Abstain from all appearance of evil”** (1 Thessalonians 5:22) commands the Lord.

Question 3: *Why should a Christian avoid tribal meetings and similar gatherings?*

RATIONALIZATION OF WORLDLINESS (Revelation 22:18,19; James 3:15; Romans 12:2)

Some Christians want to have the best of two worlds. They want all the privileges of the kingdom, while they simultaneously hanker after all the glamour of the world. Such believers rationalize worldliness. Pity! They explain off fundamental truths and principles enunciated in the Word of God. These are those who remove ancient landmarks and take away from the Word of God.

“For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in the book” (Revelation 22:18,19).

How do these modern heretics rationalize worldliness? Those who indulge and persist in worldly dressing and adornment, even after they have come to the knowledge of the truth, say their immodest dressing is designed to expand the kingdom of God. They claim that they join sinners in their worldly styles in the process of inviting them into the kingdom of God. They eloquently say, “Join them to win them”. To these we answer that the scripture says: “**And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God**” (Romans 12:2). Moreover, some opine that what they put on does not matter since salvation is in their hearts. But they goof. If our hearts are saved and conformed to the Lord, our outward comportment will definitely follow suit.

Worse still, some, seeking desperately for a pretext and excuse to be like the world, assent that their models are Western or American Church leaders who live in Hollywood style, deck up in Jewelry and pride in flamboyancy. They have forgotten that Jesus taught that we should be like him, not like any preacher. “**If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple**” (Luke 14:26,27).

There are those who say that if they do not wear a worldly look they will lose their job. They, therefore, slide back like a heifer, take a dive into the world and go into spiritual slumber, snoring on the laps of worldliness. What an awful path to spiritual death and eternal separation from God! Those who go into worldliness under this guise forget that the scripture says: “**I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food**” (Job 23:12b). They, probably, have forgotten that their soul should not be sacrificed on the altar of worldliness.

Certainly, the Lord did not teach His disciples in vain to “**seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness...**” (Matthew 6:33). Such Christians who cannot decide what to do with such jobs have probably forgotten that “**if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell**” (Matthew 5:29).

Question 4: In what ways do people try to rationalize worldliness today? How would you respond to each of these attempts?

WORLDLY AMUSEMENTS

(Luke 21:34; Titus 2:12; 1 John 2:15-17).

Modern technology, idleness of mind, and a careless rush for money at the expense of the soul, have filled our cities with all sorts of amusements and time-killers, euphemistically described as 'fun'. The modern computer games, snookers, television games etc. are devices invented to amuse the mind, and turn it away from weighty, serious issues of eternal consequence. This is a dangerous trend. Believer, beware!

DANGERS OF WORLDLINESS AND WORLDLY AMUSEMENTS (James 4:4).

Worldliness is not only dangerous but deadly. Its effects are described in very negative terms in the Bible. James pictures the worldly Christian as an enemy of God and a friend of the world (James 4:4). Second, worldliness leads to backsliding. One of the early signs of backsliding is a tendency towards the world. Third, if worldliness is allowed in the Church, it leads to loss of conviction and, eventually, corrupts the mind of the children of God. Fourth, if worldliness is allowed in individual lives or a local assembly, the presence and power of God would diminish or even disappear. Fifth, worldliness disallows the building of godly homes. Sixth, worldly amusements bring about carnal competition in the church. Seventh, worldliness incurs the wrath of God and this, at times, is fatal. Eighth, worldly amusements weaken the church and individual lives as people spend precious time on trifles and vanities. When the membership of a church is given to amusements, little or no time is left for evangelism, visitation, follow-up and other services that have eternal value. Ninth, worldliness destroys the future of the church and makes nominal Christians of her membership. It must, therefore, be avoided like a plague.

Question: 5: *What inherent dangers does worldliness pose to the individual and the church at large?*

LESSON 468

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE OF CHRISTIANS

MEMORY VERSE: “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge” (Hebrews 13:4)

TEXT: Matthew 19:3-12; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Ephesians 5:22-3

Marriage is one of the most sacred institutions in life. Marriage or the joining together of a man and a woman in holy matrimony signals or flags off the family life. In response to a question from the Pharisees, Jesus “**answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?**” (Matthew 19:4,5).

Christian teaching on marriage is expected to be accepted and practised like other doctrines or teachings of the Bible. Our marriages must be directed and guided by God’s word so as to achieve the purpose for which the wise God set it up. Wherever the teaching of God’s word on marriage is neglected or rejected, much trouble results. It is sad that the guiding scriptural principles on marriage are deliberately being ignored by many so-called Christians today resulting in incalculable spiritual loss, frustration, disappointment, unfaithfulness, sorrow and, at times, painful separation for couples that were joined together in a Bible-believing Church.

Though it is not unexpected to see unbelievers abuse this sacred institution, heaven is very sad at the sight of multitude of Christians going contrary to the will, purpose and plan of God in their choice of life partners. Life goals have been aborted, ministries cut short, joy ruined and life destroyed because people turned aside from God’s command on marriage and family life. Scores of young men and women who should be on fire for God groan under the painful consequences of wrong choice in marriage. This is why a clear teaching on marriage and family life is very significant to enhance the health and spiritual wholeness of the Church today.

Question 1: Give scriptural reasons why God instituted marriage and family life.

We establish from the Scripture that marriage is, first, God’s plan and programme from the beginning (Genesis 2:18,20,22-24; Ephesians 5:31). Second, marriage is a divinely ordained necessity (Genesis 2:18; Psalm 68:6). Third, it makes for preservation of purity and holiness in the church and society (1 Corinthians 7:2,9-11; 1 Timothy 5:9-15). Fourth, marriage works for the completeness and fulfillment of true living (Ecclesiastes 4:9-11). It provides needed fellowship, comfort, companionship and partnership. Finally, marriage complements God’s work of procreation (Genesis 1:27,28; Psalm 128:3). With very few exceptions, most people should marry. These few exceptions should be guided by God (Matthew 19:10-12; 1 Corinthians 7:7,8,32,34) and must not be the product of selfish, immature decisions, misguided imitation, faithless conclusion or religious compulsion. And, as the believer takes the journey into marriage, he or she should pray, study and meditate on God’s word sufficiently

in order to avoid being misled by ‘concerned’ counsellors (in or outside the church), friends, family members and family planning clinics in the world.

Question 2: *Mention some wrong motivations that compel some people not to marry.*

COMMENCEMENT OF THE JOURNEY OF MARRIAGE (Ecclesiastes 3:1,11; Psalm 32:8,9; Joshua 3:4; Isaiah 30:18-21)

Marriage journey begins with a desire or a sense of need in an individual for a life partner with whom to share life in an intimate way. God has created every man with this innate feeling and it manifests naturally through maturity, inner urge or a compelling feeling for a life partner when the time comes. A believer’s response to this urge is to approach God in prayer for guidance. As we pray earnestly and sincerely, God communicates with our hearts in a way as to lead us to His perfect choice of partner. It may be through a still small voice in the heart (Proverbs 20:27; John 10:4,5,27; Acts 10:17-21) or a strong mind-dominating affection for a particular person. Such affection is God-given and it cannot be quenched by temporary or contrary circumstances (Song of Solomon 8:6,7). Still, in other cases, it may be through dreams or a definite impression in the heart. For others, God can speak through His Word or make a definite impression in the heart in the course of listening to a message or sermon. Whatever channel He chooses to use - revelation, dream, vision or impression - God will not contradict His written word. If any revelation we receive contradicts the Scripture it must be rejected. It should also be subjected to the peace test contrary to fear and hurry.

Question 3: *Mention some ways through which God reveals His will in marriage to us.*

COMMON PITFALLS TO AVOID (1 Corinthians 10:6-12; Proverbs 31:30; Judges 14:1-3; Ezekiel 14:1-6)

The path to the married life is strewn with dangers which the believer must avoid in order to remain in the will of God and enjoy a healthy relationship.

Question 4: *Mention some pitfalls to avoid in the choice of a life partner.*

As we seek to know the will of God, we should not walk by sight. To determine the suitability of an intending partner through his or her material possession and secular position is to walk by sight. The possession of a good brain and a good hand to make money does not guarantee the possession of a good heart which makes a good home. Second, we should not preempt God. In other words, a heavy dependence, for example, on dreams and dreams alone makes it easier to be deceived. Rather, the sincere seeker should be open to whatever channel God decides to use to speak. Preempting God leads to confusion.

Third, every ‘idol’ should be removed from the heart. That is to say that we should not pre-fix our minds on a particular person asking only that God

should rubber-stamp him or her for us. That idol may not be God's will. He or she may not even be a child of God. We should remember that only God knows the heart of men. Some who appear like Christians outwardly may be something else within. Samson made his choice by sight and suffered greatly for it. Several others are still ensnared in this trap today.

Fourth, under no circumstance should a true believer marry a non-believer. It does not matter whether the person attends church or not. God prohibits unequal yoke in marriage (2 Corinthians 6:14; 1 Corinthians 6:15,16; Deuteronomy 7:1-4).

Fifth, we should avoid the carnal practice of allowing others to pick partners for us. God is still our perfect Match-maker. Some people run back to the village to get married to people they little know. In doing so, they feel that they are smart and cutting short what they consider to be a long procedure by the church. They avoid serious praying and close scrutiny of spiritual leaders whom God has set over them. In time, they reap the bitter fruits of unhappy and burdensome marriage.

CHRISTIAN COURTSHIP (Genesis 24:49-52; Proverbs 24:27; Luke 14:28-32; 1:26,27; Matthew 1:18; 1 Corinthians 10:31)

After knowing the will of God, the intending brother or sister, as the case may be is expected to inform the pastor of the church or his appointed leaders who carry out the oversight function of guiding young believers in marriage. The pastor or committee then counsels them on simple but basic regulatory procedures to follow. The first is to secure their parents' consent. Parental consent gives the church authority to allow the intending couple to begin courtship.

The period between knowing the will of God in marriage and the wedding is known as courtship. It is a period of learning and getting to know one another through regular praying and discussions tailored towards the future of their dream home. This period also affords them the opportunity to talk about important issues like money management in the home, career after marriage, bearing and rearing children, type of accommodation, and so on.

During courtship, openness must be made a mutual principle. Truth about one another's past and present that have the potential to affect them in future should be discussed. Second, holiness should be central as the intending couples are not expected to engage in actions that are meant only for married people. Third, prayer should not be relegated to the background. Problems are solved, doubts dissolved, mountains moved and oppositions are turned to opportunities through prayers. Prayer brings down heaven's provisions. Fourth, neither of the two should impose his or her ideas on the other. Fifth, if they are unable to resolve a particular issue, such should be brought to the attention of the supervising committee or the pastor. Should there be some grave or shocking discoveries, for example, that either of the party is a sinner, has demonic problems, irreconcilable conviction on Christian marriage, doubts over doctrines, etc. recourse must be made to the marriage committee. We should always remember that a broken courtship is better than a broken marriage.

Question 5: *Mention some helpful guiding principles during courtship.*

CHRISTIAN ENGAGEMENT AND WEDDING (John 2:1-3; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Philippians 4:5; 1 Timothy 4:12,16).

Both engagement and wedding are common to the world and the church. These two occasions should be done bearing Scriptural injunctions in mind. Neither should there be a forum to feed the flesh, display carnality and worldliness and water down sound conviction that had been upheld for years.

During engagement, especially, all forms of deception should be discouraged. Deceits couched in jokes in the name of tradition should be avoided. Believers must steer clear of all such jokes and feigned lies. We must also avoid compromise in the areas of what we do or give as part of the engagement requirement. Anything that has to do with idolatry, alcoholic beverages, cowries, kola nuts, etc. must be avoided. Generally, engagement and wedding become problematic when an intending couple live inconsistent lives. Costly provisions for the pride of life should be left out. Worldly adornments, practices and dressing should be avoided. The following questions could provide a gauge for our engagement and wedding: how godly or worldly is my dressing and spending? How watchful or wasteful am I? Who will be glorified at my wedding – Christ, self or the flesh? Will I be sad or happy should Christ come on my wedding day?

Question 6: *What should be the focus of a Christian during the engagement and marriage ceremonies?*

CHRISTIAN FAMILY LIFE (Psalm 128:1-4; Proverbs 5:15-23; 31:10-31; 1 Corinthians 7:3-5,10; Ephesians 5:22-33; 1 Peter 3:1-8).

Family life after wedding is a learning experience that can only be terminated by death. The bottom-line is the need to carefully but excitedly study one another. There is always the need for adjustments by both husband and wife. The areas of adjustments are numerous. These initial adjustments will work well only in an environment of humility, love, patience and temperance.

Question 7: *What causes problems in Christian families and what are the solutions?*

As the couple relates together from day to day, offences will certainly come. These offences have some of their causes rooted in finance, food pattern, time management, working life, non-availability of one of the partners, house helps, sharp differences in tribal practices, exaggerated expectations, wrong notions, interference from extended families and so on. The magnitude and nature of the problems differ from family to family. Proper attitude in handling the problems is a vital issue. When problems are poorly-handled, they snowball into bigger, more complex proportions and, at times, result in separation. There are homes where, though the couples live together, they are indeed separated at heart.

Divorce, separation, strained, stressful or dead relationship amongst couples is not the will of God. The word of God has solutions to all family problems. God instituted marriage and He has adequately provided for happiness in our families.

CAUSES OF CONFLICT IN THE HOME (1 Samuel 8:4,5,7; John 15:12-14; Genesis 25:20-23; Ephesians 5:22-25; Colossians 3:18-21; 1 Peter 3:1-7)

Problems in Christian families begin when the couple gives the devil a place in their hearts. This is done unwittingly as one or both partners entertain insinuation of in-laws, gossips of maids and neighbours or suspicion. This has caused much harm (Philippians 4:8; 1 John 4:1). Another source of problem is the failure of either of the partners to “leave and cleave” (Matthew 19:4-6; Mark 10:6-9; Genesis 2:24). God expects the man to leave (though not to abandon) his parents and cleave to his wife.

The third cause of problems in the family is worldliness, extravagance and carnal comparison of one’s family or spouse with others (1 Samuel 8:4,5,7). Comparing one’s family with others is unwise (2 Corinthians 10:12). Instead, we should endeavour to live by God’s standard. Fourth, lack of love and affection for one another (Titus 2:4; John 15:12-14). Both spouses must have the will to love. Impatience, strife, malice, nagging, and bitterness should not be named in Christian families. A real sanctification experience in the lives of the couple keeps all these vices out of the family and keeps the family in unity, harmony and love. Fifth, pride. The wife need not challenge the husband’s headship and authority but respond in godly submission. When she feels marginalized or trampled under, the husband should apologize. Inability to apologize and failure to always go to the Lord in prayer strain relationships, create communication gaps, and reduce mutual trust and respect for one another.

Sixth, problems of childlessness may bring emotional stress and conflict in the family. Where this occurs, the couple should take it to the Lord in prayer (Genesis 25:20-23). The Lord can make “**the barren to be mother of seven**” (1 Samuel 2:5). Any decision suggested by unbelief is wrong and sinful because “**whatever is not of faith is sin**” (Romans 14:23).

Seventh, lack of submission on the part of the wife. The Bible commands the wife to be submissive to her husband (Ephesians 5:22-25; Colossians 3:18-21; 1 Peter 3:1-7). The wife’s submission provokes the husband to much love. He will labour to provide the needs of the family. He will cherish the wife as the Lord does the Church. On the other hand, lack of love from the husband can affect the wife negatively. While each partner tries to meet the needs of one another at home, there might be noticeable shortcomings. No matter how pronounced these might be, there must be mutual appreciation of one another’s effort. Lack of appreciation creates conflicts.

Eight, conflicts also come through money management, business and spending habits (Luke 16:10-12). Secretiveness in financial matters or projects makes room for suspicion and tension. Ninth, conflicts may also come through demonic infiltration through house helps, third parties or relations. Tenth, where infidelity or unfaithfulness creeps in, confusion will surely ensue. Immorality destroys the fabrics of the family and should be avoided by all means. This sin or any sin for that matter should not once be seen among Christians.

God’s will for every family is that they live the days of heaven here on earth (Deuteronomy 11:21). This is attainable if we allow the Holy Spirit to work in us and prayerfully build the walls of our home with our commitment to work towards a happy, healthy and holy home.

