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Lesson 391

ISRAEL'S UNBELIEF AND REBELLION AGAINST GOD

MEMORY VERSE: “And wherefore hath the Lord brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? Were it not better for us to return into Egypt? And they said one to another, let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt” (**Numbers 14:3,4**).

TEXT: Numbers 14:1-45

Israel's unbelief, murmuring and rebellion against God forms the focus of this study. Their action was sequel to the evil report of the ten spies in the previous chapter which they believed. It is surprising however that the majority of the Israelites believed the reports of the ten spies contrary to the age-long promise of God to give them the promised land to possess, which was even the main reason for their deliverance from Egyptian captivity. Had they reminisced about the divine favour and benevolence they had hitherto enjoyed in their covenant relationship with God, faith in the power of God to carry them through would have sprung up in their hearts. Obviously, those who forget or despise the word of God will not have productive faith that brings about their needed miracle. God expects that our **“faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God”**.

The multitudes of Israelites went off course when they failed to exercise faith in the word and power of God. In their unbelief, they cried, made derogatory statements against their leaders, confessed their desire to die, and blasphemed the God who brought them out of Egypt. They said they wanted to go back to Egypt through leaders they sought to appoint for themselves. This is clear rebellion as God does not provide any return tickets for pilgrims whom He has promised to take to the Promised Land, the roughness of the road notwithstanding. God is never happy with those who draw back from Him (Hebrews 10:38), those who by their actions show that there is a better and a more gracious master than Him.

Question 1: *What are some of the negative attitudes the Israelites exhibited in our text that believers need to avoid for them to be able to enjoy divine blessings?*

The Israelites' expressed desire to die for fear of death occasioned by the report is a show of cowardice. Since the land was famed to eat up its inhabitants according to the evil report of the ten spies, they should have faced it without murmuring if they really wanted to die. But the truth is that, they wanted to live but were unwilling to fight any battle with their enemies before getting to the Promised Land. The spiritually indolent will hardly possess the blessings that Christ's death and resurrection has procured for him. Not all believers know what it takes to possess their desired blessings promised in Christ. Those who seek to claim and enjoy the promises of God need to avoid all the negative attitudes of the ten spies and the congregation manifested in our text. The uniform testimony of the scriptures is summed up in this truth that,

“The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him” (Lamentation 3:25).

THE UNBELIEF AND REBELLION OF THE ISRAELITES (Numbers 14:1-4; 13:26-33; Deuteronomy 1:22-28; 1 Corinthians 10:1-5,10-12; Hebrews 3:7-19; 4:6,11; Romans 8:35-38)

This was the second time the congregation of the Israelites would weep since their exodus from Egypt. They first wept as a result of the bad influence of the mixed multitude at the time they needed meat (Numbers 11:4,5). Now, it was their chosen representatives who brought discouraging reports of the things they might suffer if they continued in God’s will and way. Really, believers need to know that God has not promised to take anyone to heaven on a bed of roses. There are challenges to face; there are battles to fight, in the strength and power of God’s Spirit. This is what believers’ call entails. **“For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake”** (Philippians 1:29).

Understandably, Satan does not want anyone to get to heaven from where he was cast out. In his attempt to weaken the believer’s faith and make him loose his faith in God, the devil explores lots of avenues including orchestrated rumours and evil reports of how hard and near impossible it is to obtain the promises of God on earth and the promise of making it to heaven. But the devil is a liar and the father of it. All that the believer needs do to be determined and dogged to be able to make a successful pilgrimage to heaven (Romans 8:35-38). Faith – not fear or unbelief – is what will make us triumph over adverse situations of life that seek to overwhelm us.

Faith will make us sing praises during adversity like Paul and Silas did to bring about a greater miracle to the glory of God. Our attitudes during adversity will make or mar us. God is always good, holy, pure, wise, kind, and merciful irrespective of our present predicament. Blinded by unbelief, however, the Israelites alleged that God brought them into the wilderness to destroy them. Their rhetorical questions, **“wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt?”** have been rephrased and reechoed by many a believer who feels his portion in life is hard. Such questions or thought about God are unfair. Those who remain pure, committed and loyal to God will find out that all things work together for their good.

It is quite unfortunate that the Israelites were asking these questions when they were at the brink of entering the Promised Land. What believers fail to learn is that it is always darkest before the dawn. Rather than fret, murmur, rebel, blaspheme against God, the scripture prescribes that we should wait for the salvation of the Lord in faith, absolutely trusting in His love and mercy for divine intervention.

Question 2: Why do men murmur against God and leadership today, despite His divine provision for them?

It is fear and unbelief that make men to doubt God’s omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience in all situations of life, and to murmur against God and God-appointed leaders. Adult believers need to be careful with the use

of their tongues so as not to incite other fickle-minded and unstable Christians to murmur against God and God-appointed leaders. Our conversation with the people of God should be faith-building. Rather than present negative examples that discourage, we are enjoined to exhort other brethren to **“lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; ... lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed”** (Hebrews 12:12,13). In the church, at home and in the public, believers should use their tongues to draw men’s souls to and not sever them from Christ’s plan of salvation (Job 27:4; Psalm 34:13; 39:1).

Question 3: *How should a Christian use his tongue to fulfill Christ’s plan of redemption for humanity?*

The eyes of faith see silver lining in any cloud of circumstances. So, it was with Caleb and Joshua. Caleb stilled the unbelieving spies and quickly encouraged and ordered Israel, **“Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it”** (Numbers 14:6). Faith sees beyond the visible. Although all the spies sent out to survey the land of promise saw exactly the same things, the perception of ten of them was different, and so was their interpretation of what they saw. While one group saw opportunities and strength, the other saw threats and weaknesses not having eyes of faith to see the invisible.

Failure to see with the eyes of faith can lead to missed opportunities and ultimate failure in life. Manifestation of unbelief in a single person can lead thousands of others astray. The scripture warns against **“an evil heart of unbelief,”** (Hebrews 3:7-19; 4:6,11), which fails to perceive the goodness of the Lord and never believes a mountain can be surmounted. Unbelief is sin. It is better to trust in God than to lean on the visible, which most often, presents misleading information that can easily discourage. Their unbelief soon sealed their doom (Exodus 16:3; 17:3; Deuteronomy 1:27; Numbers 14:28). Their unbelief did not reduce the omnipotence of God, however.

Question 4: *What are some of the discouraging factors confronting Christians today? How should we approach them?*

REJECTION OF APPEAL AND RENEWAL OF INTERCESSION FOR ISRAEL (Numbers 14:5-20; 16:4,22,45; 20:6; Exodus 17:4; 16:7; 1 Samuel 30:6; Matthew 23:37; Acts 7:52,59;)

Holy men cannot bear to hear blasphemy against the Lord or a declaration to return to Egypt. Observe faith-filled believers’ response to the sin of unbelief in our passage. Moses and Aaron **“fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel”** while Joshua and Caleb **“rent their clothes”** in apparent disapproval of the people’s actions. This great humility found in their leaders could not soften their hearts or turn them away from their evil decision. True to what the scripture says, **“The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways...”** (Proverbs 14:14).

Joshua and Caleb assured the congregation of the goodness of the land. Their exhortation was tailored to address the spiritual problem of the people and to activate faith in their hearts to follow the plan of God for their lives. They said, **“The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good**

land. If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not" (Numbers 14:7-9). It is clear that God has provided great and incomparable blessings for His children whom He delights in.

However, the abundant blessings of God in Christ can not be claimed and possessed by the rebellious and fearful. Those who live in sin and unrighteousness and will not answer God's call to salvation as a result of fear of men cannot possess the blessings of God. Reason? Sin attracts sorrow, problems, ill-luck, nightmares, disappointment, depression, heartache, sickness, disease, demonic affliction, losses, failure, retrogression, death, etc. Sinners are ruined by their own rebellion, unbelief and resistance to the provision of salvation through Christ. But those who, like Joshua and Caleb, are full of faith through salvation experience, are sure to enjoy the presence of God which the unbelieving do not see.

Question 5: What should be the attitude of believers and Christian leaders to any problem in the church?

The divine presence Joshua and Caleb spoke about manifested immediately at the time the aggrieved multitudes attempted to stone them. The timely appearance of the divine "**glory**" prevented these faithful servants of God from being stoned to death by this unbelieving multitudes. Believers do many things akin to throwing stones at God-appointed leaders who seek to lead them on the path of righteousness. We need to be careful not to despise or speak against them (Numbers 14:10; Exodus 17:4; 2 Samuel 16:6,13; Matthew 23:37; John 8:59; 10:31-33). God declared that the Israelites refused to believe in Him in spite of the many miracles and signs He had showed to make them repose their confidence in Him. He threatened to destroy them for their unbelief. Their unbelief had graduated from crying, murmuring, blaspheming to visible acts of violence, and murder which they would have committed were it not for the intervention of God. As it were, justice requires that sin be punished.

To prevent the manifestation of God's wrath that would usually lead to deaths of many Israelites, Moses interceded for the backslidden Israel. What a good example this is for every spiritual leader! Moses prayed for those that despitely used Him. He earnestly pleaded for God's mercy and forgiveness on their behalf. "**Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now**" (Numbers 14:19).

Though God purposed to disinherit Israel and raise up for Moses a greater and mightier nation than they Moses refused to see the multitude perish and himself become a greater nation. He always advanced reasons that bother on the glory of God as grounds for them to be forgiven (Exodus 32:12,32; 34:9; Numbers 14:13-19; Deuteronomy 9:28). A leader then must not place his personal gain above the interest of God's heritage. He should stand in the gap for God's people and see how God could be glorified in all things (1 Peter 5:1-4).

Question 6: Mention reasons why all Christians should seek God's glory in whatever they do.

The Lord granted the prayer of Moses for Israel but insisted on destroying those who disbelieved Him. He reasoned with Moses that His own glory which was known to all nations when He brought out Israel from Egypt should not be given to another. God will not share his glory with any person. The pursuit of God's glory in anything makes the motive right.

Those who disbelieved God's ability to fulfil His promises forfeit the benefits of such blessings they should have enjoyed. All the adult Israelites who despised the pleasant land which they should have inherited had they heeded the plea and admonition of their leaders were now to be shut out of it. And this promise of God was to be fulfilled for their children who were under twenty years of age, and whom they, in their unbelief, said "**should be a prey**". It is dangerous to forsake the word of God. Since faith cometh by hearing, reading, studying and listening to the word of God, every believer need to be diligent in acquiring and meditating on it (Joshua 1:8; 1 Samuel 15:22-23; Micah 6:6-8; Exodus 19:5).

REWARDS FOR WHOLE-HEARTED DEDICATION (Numbers 14:20-24; 13:30; 14:6-9; 26:65; Deuteronomy 1:36; Joshua 14:6-14; 2 Corinthians 2:14; 1 John 4:4; 5:4,5; Revelation 12:11; Ephesians 6:12; Colossians 2:15).

Question 7: *What lessons can you learn from Caleb's spirit of whole-hearted dedication to God's word and service and God's faithfulness to His promises?*

Caleb was a man of noble and heroic courage. He was rightly rewarded for his uprightness, steadfastness and total reliance on God's promise. Caleb got to the promised land and possessed his possession even at an old age. "**Hebron therefore became the inheritance of Caleb...unto this day, because that he wholly followed the Lord God of Israel**" (Joshua 14:7,10-12,14). Underscored here is the point that it is not just enough to begin the Christian race, it is he who continues and endures to the end that will be saved and rewarded. But it is faith that will win the victory. God rewards only those who overcome. Since it is only those who overcome temptations and trials of faith that have testimonies, it is also those who bear their cross to the end that wear the crown.

JUDGMENT OF THE REBELLIOUS ISRAELITES (Numbers 14:25-45; 14:2; 32:11; Deuteronomy 1:35; Hebrews 3:16-19; 4:1-3; Psalm 73:27,28).

Manifestation of unbelief by Israel incurred the wrath of God. For their unbelief, God declared they would not step into the Promised Land but that their carcasses would fall in the wilderness. Evil reporters that influenced others to sin against God were judged and they died in the plague. Those who manifest unbelief together with those who delight in giving evil reports to weaken the faith of others in God are treading dangerous ground as those who incurred the wrath of God.

He is a God of mercy and also a God of judgment. Those who lead others into sin in scripture like Jeroboam do not escape the judgment of God. Be careful what you do and say among God's people. People may continue to do evil and feel judgment will not come, but it will come when all the opportunities

God has granted them to repent of their sins have been wasted (2 Peter 3:9). If these men who brought evil report with the congregation had heeded the plea of Moses and the exhortation of Joshua and Caleb, they would have escaped being judged. **“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God”** (Hebrews 3:12). And if you are still living in sin, repent and receive Christ as Saviour and Lord by faith, and continue to live a faith-filled and graceful lifestyle in Christ to the end to be rewarded.

Lesson
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LAWS CONCERNING OFFERINGS

MEMORY VERSE: “Then it shall be if ought be committed by ignorance without the knowledge of the congregation, that all the congregation shall offer one young bullock for a burnt offering, for a sweet savour unto the LORD, with his meat offering according to the manner and one kid of the goats for a sin offering” (**Numbers 15:24**).

TEXT: Numbers 15:1–41

This chapter which comes between two rebellions (that of Israel in chapter 14 and the other of Korah and company in chapter 16) dwells extensively on sacrifices and offerings. In the preceding chapter, the entire congregation had provoked the Lord, who determined to destroy them in His wrath. He had sentenced them to perish in the wilderness. It was the importunate and effectual intercession of Moses that secured God’s gracious pardon for them. Our text therefore opens with God repeating in greater detail the laws concerning offerings when they come to the Promised Land. This was in effect showing that He was fully reconciled with them **“not imputing their trespasses unto them”**. The Lord, in giving the laws, had implied that He would give the Promised Land to their children notwithstanding their being prone to rebel against Him. This clearly shows the Lord’s faithfulness in contrast to the people’s unfaithfulness.

Question 1: *What lessons can we learn from the Lord’s promise to take the children of Israel to the Promised Land despite their unfaithfulness?*

There are lessons to learn from the Lord’s promise to take the children of Israel to the Promised Land despite their unfaithfulness. One, our God is faithful to all His

promises. He always keeps His promises. Not a jot or a tittle will fail of His word without being fulfilled. All we need to do is to take Him at His word and it will come to pass. The children of Israel wandered in

the wilderness for 40 years due to their rebellion and unbelief, yet the Lord fulfilled the promise to their children. Two, unbelief deprives us of the benefits of the blessings the Lord has promised. All those from 20 years and above who did not believe the Lord died in the wilderness. God demands obedience, faith and consistency from the believer if he is to continue to enjoy His goodness.

REGULATIONS CONCERNING SACRIFICES (Numbers 15:1-13,17-21; 28:1-31; 29:1-40; Leviticus 2:1-11)

An earlier set of instructions (Leviticus 2:1-11) regarding meal offering gave no exact quantities. Here we now have a passage specifying exact proportions of all that is needed for the offerings. Looking forward to the time when the people would eat of the food of Canaan, the Lord gave them directions for making token contributions of the first fruits of their produce (heave offerings). The amount of mixed oil and flour and wine for the drink offering increases with the size of the animal offered.

Question 2: *What were the regulations concerning the offerings?*

The instruction states that the quantity of meal and flour must be increased in proportion to the size of the sacrifice with which it was offered. The objective of this regulation was to direct the proportion the meat-offering and drink-offering should bear to several sacrifices to which they were to accompany. If the sacrifice was a lamb or a kid that was to be offered, it was to be accompanied with **“one tenth deal of flour, the fourth part of a hin of oil, and the fourth part of a hin of wine.”** If it was a ram, then the meat offering was doubled: **“two tenth deals of flour, a third part of a hin of oil, and a third part of a hin of wine.”** If the sacrifice was a bullock, then the meat offering was to be tripled: **“three tenth deals of flour, half a hin of oil, and half a hin of wine.”**

There are four classes of offering to which meat and drink offerings were to be added. These are: one, burnt offerings (verse 3); two, sacrifices in performing vows; three, freewill offerings; four, offerings for the solemn feasts. All these were to be sweet savour offerings. There are also four sources of offering in the passage. (i) There is the herds which include cattle of all kinds – cows, oxen, bullocks, calves and heifers (verses 3,8,11; Leviticus 3:1-17; 1:1-9). (ii) The flocks which include the rams, lambs, sheep and goats (Verses 3,5,6,11; Leviticus 1:10-13). (iii) The birds which include the pigeons and turtle doves (Leviticus 1:14-17). (iv) The fields which include wheat fields, olive trees and vineyards.

Question 3: *What were the underlying principles in all these offerings?*

There are underlying principles in all these offerings. First is that a man is to give according to his ability (Leviticus 5:7-13; 2 Corinthians 8:12). Also, it is that our religious services and worship should be governed by God's rules and should not be

done arbitrarily or according to our terms. Today, God expects believers to give Him an offering, **“an odour of a sweet smell a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God”** (Philippians 4:18, Hebrews 13:16). But this must be done in accordance with the rules acceptable to God. We, as believers, should learn from the example from the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself who was sacrificed for us as an **“offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour”** (Ephesians 5:2).

The various offerings, like the ones in Leviticus, present various aspects of the person and redemptive work of Christ. The offerings looked forward to when Israel would settle in the land and be at rest. Besides, four things stand out in the offerings. One, the perfections of Christ's sinless humanity portrayed by the **“meal offering of between a tenth deal of flour to three tenth part of an hin of oil”** (verses 4,6,9). This suggests an increasing measure of the victorious believer's spiritual understanding of Christ. Two, the perfections of Christ's sinless humanity is also emphasized by the fine **“flour mixed with ... oil”** (verses 4,6,9). This typifies Jesus Christ, the God-man, conceived of the Holy Spirit by the virgin Mary (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:35). Three, the wine of the drink offering (verses 5,7,10) shows the joy of Christ being poured out in the service of God for our redemption (Psalm 40:8). It also signifies the joy of the believer in the service of the Lord (Philippians 2:17,18). Four, the **“sweet savour offering”** typifies the infinite delight and supreme satisfaction of Christ's redemptive work God-ward.

RULES CONCERNING FOREIGNERS AND SACRIFICES (Numbers 15:14-16; Isaiah 56:3; Luke 2:32; Ephesians 3:16; Acts 15:14,15).

Question 4: *What can we learn from God's non-discriminatory stance towards strangers?*

That there should be **“one law.... for you and for the stranger that sojourneth with you”** shows that strangers or non-Israelites were welcomed to sojourn and worship with the Israelites. They however had an obligation to worship in God's appointed way and not in their own way. The spiritual decadence of the surrounding people was such that the introduction of their religious practices would have defiled the Israelites. This was why a stranger must keep to the same rule of worship. The plan of God has always been to **“have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of truth”**. The law therefore sets the Israelites as well as the stranger on the same spiritual platform. This has far reaching implications. (i) The divine invitation to the Gentiles to embrace the faith as well as worship the true God shows that with God, there is no respect of persons (Isaiah 56:3; Colossians 3:25). (ii) This singular act places an obligation on the Jews to be kind to strangers and not to oppress them, since the Gentiles are owned and accepted by God. (iii) This law was meant to put down the pride of the Jews who were usually puffed up with their birthright privileges of being **“Abraham's seed”** (John 8:33). God here made them to know that no man's birth or parentage should turn either to his advantage or his prejudice in his acceptance with God. (iv) Believers should make it a point of duty to happily reach out to the Gentiles and bring them into the Body of Christ. As the law made so little difference between Jews and Gentiles, so does the gospel, which has broken down the middle wall of partition and reconciled both to God in one sacrifice.

SACRIFICES FOR SINS OF IGNORANCE (Numbers 15:22-26, Leviticus 4:13-21, 27; Psalm 19:12, 1 John 2:1,2).

There are three broad categories of sins in the Bible: the sins of commission, omission and presumption; the last two, being sins of omission and presumption, are treated in this study.

Sins of omission are also referred to as sins of ignorance. These are called sins of omission because the people have not observed all the commandments (verses 23,29). If

they failed in the offerings of their acknowledgement by not bringing them according to law, then they needed to bring an offering of atonement because the omission was as a result of forgetfulness or mistake. **"...if ought be committed by ignorance of the congregation"** (verse 24) relates to national sins committed through ignorance. The congregation of the people might have forgotten some observance of the laws which were varied. If through consultation with God's law, they discovered the omission, then they were to bring a sacrifice to be offered so as to receive pardon from God for the oversight. Hezekiah did this when he made an atonement for the errors during his father's reign by sacrificing seven bullocks, seven rams, seven lambs, and seven he-goats (2 Chronicles 29:21,24).

Question 5: What lessons can we deduce from the sins of omission and its atonement?

There are some lessons for us here. One, as Christian, we must realize that God demands total obedience to the entire scriptures. We have no right to omit any part of the scripture in our worship, preaching and Christian living. God accepts nothing short of total obedience to the entire precept of the word. Ignorance of any doctrine when we have the entire Bible at our disposal is unacceptable unto the Lord. We should note that the servant who knows his master's will and another who does not but do things worthy of stripes will both be beaten with stripes (Luke 12:47,48). David seemed to know this when he prayed to be cleansed from secret faults. There is need to ask for divine search light to be beamed on our character and conduct frequently to see if there be any wicked way in our lives, so that repentance and restitution can be made (Psalm 139:23,24; Psalm 26:2).

Two, there is need for constant thorough self-examination to ensure we remain in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5). Lastly, we must appropriate the means of grace for the atonement of sin if we fall short of the divine standard. However, we must not take the grace of God for granted knowing the grave consequence of such.

SEVERE PUNISHMENT FOR PRESUMPTUOUS SINNERS (Numbers 15:30-36; 1 John 5:16,17; 1 Corinthians 5:5; Hebrews 10:26-31)

"But the soul that doeth ought presumptuously, whether he be born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproacheth the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Because he hath despised the word of the LORD, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him" (Numbers 13:30).

Presumptuous sins refer to persistent wilful sins which the Bible calls the **"sin unto death"**. They also refer to sinning with impunity. This involves premeditated act. It is foolish boldness. Presumptuous sinners confront God's authority and set up their own lust in competition with the Lord. They sin in defiance of the penalty of their sins. They fight against God and sin deliberately against His will and glory. Sins committed this way are exceeding sinful. By this act, the sinner (i) reproaches the Lord (verse 30). By sinning presumptuously, a sinner maintains that (a) Eternal truth is not fit to be believed. (b) The Lord of all earth is not fit to be obeyed. (c) Almighty power is not fit to be feared or trusted. (d) He ascribes indignity to the righteous Judge of heaven and earth. (ii) Despises the Word of God, thinking that he is too great, too good and too wise to be under the control of God's Word. This sin is rebellion which is as the sin of witchcraft (1 Samuel 15:23).

Question 6: What are the consequences of presumptuous sins?

The sentence passed on presumptuous sinner is terrible and dreadful: **"That soul shall be cut off from among his people"** (verse 30) and **"his iniquity shall be upon**

him" (verse 31). An instance of presumptuous sin in the passage is given of a man who decided in defiance of God to gather sticks on a Sabbath day. The offender was arrested and detained while Moses consulted God, and the sentence was passed by the Almighty. He was stoned to death to serve as deterrent to others. Those who have become apostates and presumptuous sinners blaspheme against the Holy Ghost, thus sealing their doom as there is no place of repentance for them. Their lot is an eternal damnation in hell fire, "**where their worm dieth not, nor the fire quenched.**" This is why "**he that thinketh he standeth**" must "**take heed lest he fall**"

The punishment meted out on this presumptuous sinner teaches that God certainly punishes sin no matter how long it takes. There is no hiding place for presumptuous sinners. Two, no sin is too little or small to receive God's fierce judgment. Gathering a few sticks on the Sabbath day was breaking of God's law and so punishable. Three, we need to hold the Lord and His Word in the highest regard if we are to escape the judgment that is to come upon the world. Four, as Christians, we need to respect and hallow the Lord's Day by not doing our own pleasure on that day. We should use the Lord's Day for worship, reading, meditation, studying and preaching the word of God.

THE LAW CONCERNING FRINGES (Numbers 15:37-41).

The Lord commanded Moses to instruct the children of Israel to wear fringes (tassels) at the borders of their garments with an attached "**cord of blue**". Let it be stressed that the fringes were not appointed for mere adorning and beautification of their clothes. It was to stir up their minds to remember and to warn them during temptation that they should not break God's commandments. Like them, we should use every means at our disposal to refresh our memories with the truths and precepts of God's word, to strengthen our faith and make us more obedient, and equip ourselves against temptation. After giving the law for the pardon for the sins of ignorance, it was expedient for the Lord to provide for the prevention of such sin in its entirety. The Jews being a peculiar people were to be distinguished from their neighbours in their dress. Through this, they were taught not to be conformed to the ways of the heathen.

There are several lessons for us here. (i) Believers should realize that they are a peculiar treasure unto the Lord (1 Peter 2:9). As peculiar treasures, they must keep in mind that they cannot be conformed to this world in dressing and in life style (Romans 12:2). (ii) The colour 'blue' they were commanded to use reminded them of heaven. As Christians, it teaches us to be heavenly minded (Colossians 3:1-3).

Question 7: What is the great and fundamental law of religion?

After the repetition of the ceremonial laws, the chapter closes with the great and fundamental law of religion. Holiness is the great and fundamental law of religion. Holiness unto the Lord and sincere devotion to His service is the greatest reason for the commandment of God, nay, the reason for the scriptures, "**That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works**" (2 Timothy 3:16,17). If we believe and more frequently and seriously consider that God is the Lord, our God, and Redeemer, then we will see ourselves bound in duty, interest and gratitude to keep all His commands.

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING **EVENING**

MON	Hebrews	1-2	Deuteronomy	10-11	
TUE	"		3-4	"	12
WED	"		5-6	"	13-14
THUR	"		7-8	"	15-16
FRI	"	9-10	"	17-18	
SAT	"		11	"	19-20
SUN	"		12-13	"	21-22

Lesson 393

THE REBELLION OF KORAH, DATHAN AND ABIRAM

TEXT: NUMBERS 16:1-50

The act of Korah, Dathan and Abiram presents a dismal account of irreverence against constituted authority.

God's displeasure against Israel lately on account of the report of the ten spies notwithstanding — an event that calls for sober reflection and repentance — these malcontents and their co-travelers decided to challenge God's order and institution among His people. The entire nation was still reeling from the consequences of their unbelief in God's ability to take them to the Promised Land yet, they deemed it good to stretch divine patience further. They were brazen and impudent in their claims and refused to recant even after they were called to reason and dialogue.

Korah is presented as the rebel-in-chief for his crass boldness and ability to persuade others to rise against God's appointed servants. Subsequent references to the ugly event present him as the mastermind (Numbers 26:9; 27:3). That this company comprises "**princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown**" (Numbers 16:2), further compels those with positions of leadership in Christ's Church to tread carefully and work out their "**salvation with fear and trembling**". They were noble and notable among the Israelites; they knew God to be Lord in the midst of the congregation (Numbers 16:3); they had witnessed His wonderful acts in Egypt against Pharaoh (Exodus 7-14); they knew Him as the God of judgment and justice; they saw His presence daily in the pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night; they saw His judgment upon Miriam when she and Aaron murmured against Moses (Numbers 12:1-15), yet, they were not afraid to challenge God's decision among His people.

God's swift and unmistakable judgment upon Korah and his company calls for sober reflections by every pilgrim on heaven's high and holy way and a constant examination of our motives as we journey to our home above.

Question 1: *How can a believer avoid the envious spirit manifested by Korah and his company?*

THE PERSONALITY OF THE REBELS (Numbers 16:1,2; Exodus 6:18; 2:1,2; 15:20; Numbers 6:20,21; 3:27-29; Genesis 49:3,4).

The four names mentioned as ring leaders of the rebellion are Korah, Dathan, Abiram and On. However, from the time of the execution of the revolt till the consequent judgment of God upon them, On was never mentioned again, leaving the first three as the main actors. Whether he had a second thought on the plot or he listened to the voice of reason and withdrew from the rebellion is not recorded. Whatever the case, he extricated himself from the camp of wickedness before judgment fell. Sinners and backsliders should listen to the voice of persuasion and desist from evil, make haste to repent and retrace their steps before it is too late.

Korah was a bonafide Israelite. He was a cousin of Moses and Aaron because Kohath, the son of Levi, was their common grandfather: "**And the sons of Kohath; Amram, and Izhar, and Hebron, and Uzziel: and the years of the life of Kohath were an hundred thirty and three years**" (Exodus 6:18). While Amram gave birth to Moses, Aaron and Miriam, Izhar his brother gave birth to Korah, Nepheg and

Zichri (Exodus 2:1,2; 15:20; Numbers 6:20, 21). Moses, Aaron and Korah were therefore of the family of the Kohathites who were given the responsibility of the ministry of the tabernacle of God among the Levites.

However, in God's arrangement Moses was the divinely appointed leader of the Israelites; Aaron and his sons constituted the priesthood while Korah ministered under them as a Kohathite in the tabernacle. God did not appoint Korah or any of his father's children to head the Kohathites but He chose Elizaphan the son of Uzziel, a younger branch of the Kohathites, to be their head (Numbers 3:27,30).

Question 2: What is God's standard for choosing leaders among His people?

The Almighty God, who knows the hearts of all men, does not always choose men for service by age or status as can be seen in the cases of Jacob and Esau, Ephraim and Manasseh, Reuben and Judah, Moses and Aaron, David and the other sons of Jesse. **"But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart"** (1 Samuel 16:7).

Consider the genealogy of Dathan and Abiram also. Both of them were two of the three sons of Eliab, the first being Nemuel. Eliab was the grandson of Reuben, the first born of Israel. Dathan and Abiram were therefore Reubenites who numbered 46,500 (Numbers 2:10,11). Reuben lost his birthright as the first born of Jacob when he defiled his father's bed. Jacob prophesied concerning him, **"Reuben, thou art my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power: Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because thou wentest up to thy father's bed; then defiledst thou it: he went up to my couch"** (Genesis 49:3,4). As a result of this prophesy, Reuben lost his birthright to the sons of Joseph but the sceptre of leadership went to Judah (1 Chronicles 5:1-3).

The Reubenites were placed on the south side in the order of the camp next to the Kohathites which Korah belonged to (Numbers 2:10,11). Korah, Dathan and Abiram were therefore close to one another in the camp. These three key players in the rebellion succeeded in enlisting 250 princes, who were famous in the congregation to their group for the rebellion. It is unfortunate that personalities who were supposed to be examples in good works and in the service of God turned themselves up as willing tools in the hand of the enemy to do evil. Leaders and workers in the vineyard of the Lord today should be careful how they use their positions of influence. The rebellion seemed well thought-out with many families involved. Believers need to be on their guard against being drawn into ungodly acts through bad association. **"Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners"** (1 Corinthians 15:33).

THE DRIVE FOR POSITION BY THE REBELS (Numbers 16:3-14; Exodus 13:1,2; Numbers 3:44; 8:15-19; Leviticus 11:44; Numbers 16:8-11; Proverbs 16:18).

"And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?" (Numbers 16:3). Korah, Dathan, Abiram and their cohorts brought railing accusations against Moses and Aaron. They charged them for being too ambitious and self-serving having cornered to themselves the government of the people and priesthood in Israel. They felt that

they were equally qualified to occupy their positions. Apparently, they were fighting for equality of all the children of Israel. They also said that all Israelites were holy and so could approach God as priests for themselves. They had forgotten that leadership among God's people does not depend on age, status or education but on divine discretion. **"And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron"** (Hebrews 5:4).

The reasons adduced by the dissidents were superficial and intended to draw the support of the whole congregation for the success of the rebellion. Moses' immediate reaction to the plot is worthy of note.

Question 3: How should leaders react to incidents of rebellion and disobedience in the church today?

The immediate reaction of Moses on hearing the accusations was to fall upon his face in prayer to God. He must have asked God to reveal to him the motive behind the rebellion and what action to take to end it. Knowing that the revolt was ultimately against God and His rulership, he must have told God to intervene and glorify His name. God gave him a word of prophesy. He told Korah and his cohorts that God would show those who really are His. In readiness for the decisive encounter, Moses asked the rebels to take censers with incense and put fire in them.

Question 4: Mention the actual motive behind the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram.

Moses, as a man of God revealed the actual cause of the rebellion. For Korah and other Levites who joined in the rebellion, it was the priesthood they wanted. In which case, they wanted Aaron and his sons who were also Levites to be removed. They were not content with the ministry position God gave to them in the levitical order. However, it was God who made appointment to the priesthood and anyone trying to go against the choice of Aaron was going **"against the LORD"** (Numbers 16:8-11). Dathan and Abiram being Reubenites were not grouped with the Levites in the first revealed cause for the rebellion. When Moses sent for them, they were stubborn, disobedient and refused to come up for dialogue.

Dathan and Abiram masked their real motive for the rebellion with the suffering and delay in arriving at the Promised Land. However, their discontent was against Moses whom they accused of making himself **"altogether a prince over us"** (verse 13). Moses therefore was the target of Dathan and Abiram. They did not want him to be a prince or ruler over them. This is probably because, as Reubenites, they wanted to claim back the position of leadership which Reuben lost to the younger sons of Jacob due to the sin of defilement.

In Egypt, Moses had been asked by a fellow Israelite, **"Who made thee a prince and a judge over us?"** (Exodus 2:14). The children of Israel had also threatened to make themselves a captain to take them back to Egypt when the ten spies gave an evil report (Numbers 14:1-4). This time, it was not that they did not want a prince but they wanted another person beside Moses. Also, it was not that they did not want a priest but they wanted Aaronic priesthood changed.

Question 5: List some examples of pride and position-seeking in the Bible and the consequences.

The Bible unequivocally declares that **“Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall”** (Proverbs 16:18). Pride generally attracts divine judgment. Lucifer sought to be equate with God and he was cast down (Isaiah 14:12-15). King Nebuchadnezzar was humiliated to dwell among the beasts of the field (Daniel 4:30-33); Absalom tried unsuccessfully to depose his father David in order to be king. He died miserably in the process (2 Samuel 15:1-6; 18:9-17); Herod assumed the position of a god and was eaten of worms (Acts 12:21-23). Those who give themselves to pride do so to their own hurt as the Almighty God never overlooks actions of pride. He resists those that are proud and brings them low (James 4:6; Matthew 23:12).

Believers should learn from the fall of the high and mighty who suffered the consequences of their lust for position and power and consider the Lord Jesus Christ, who is meek and lowly in heart (Matthew 11:29). Any one who is living in rebellion should not wait for God’s visitation before repenting.

Moses gave Korah and his company up till the following day to appear before the Lord with their censers, but they never took time to repent and recant. Their ungodly ambition blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts. They thought that they were popular with the people and would equally enjoy God’s support. The voice of the people is not always the voice of God.

Korah and his people confidently and proudly came out the following day as appointed. **“And they took every man his censor, and put fire in them, and laid incense thereon, and stood in the door of the tabernacle of the congregation with Moses and Aaron”** (Numbers 16:18). In a show of his growing popularity among the congregation, Korah mobilized all the people to the door of the tabernacle against Moses and Aaron. Out of sheer rebellion, they and the congregation could not for a moment reason that their action was against God.

Only Aaron and his sons had been consecrated to offer scarifies (Exodus 28:1; 1 Chronicles 23:13). When Saul the first king of Israel did it, he lost the kingdom. A child of God should not delve into any area of ministry that God has not called him or her into. However, we should not run away from fulfilling our ministries because of fear or ministerial challenges.

DIVINE PUNISHMENT UPON THE REBELS (Numbers 26:20-50; Exodus 32:7-14; Numbers 14:11-20).

“And the Lord spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment” (Numbers 16:20,21). God in heaven was watching this absurd drama. The people were not only rebelling against His appointed leaders, but also against Him. Yet, they were carrying censers with incense and fire to offer sacrifices to Him. Would God they had remembered that **“to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams”** (1 Samuel 15:22), then would they have escaped the uncommon judgment that came on them! But they walked impudently on till judgment struck. God’s anger was kindled not only against the main actors in the unholy drama, but also against the whole congregation who were on the side of the rebels.

Moses, the man who **“was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth”**, fell upon his face along with Aaron in intercession for Israel. They pleaded with God not to destroy the whole congregation for the rebellion engineered by a few. God relented but the main actors in this great sin were not spared.

Question 6: What lesson do we learn from the intercession of Moses?

As believers, we learn that we should stand in the gap between sinners and God so that they will not perish, particularly those who are ignorant. Second, we learn that prompt intercession can avert judgment. Third, intercession can change the mind of sinners to obey God as was the case in this study. Many of the congregation who were warned by Moses kept away from the tabernacle of the rebels. Fourth, we should possess the mind of Christ and pray for sinners because **“they know not what they do”** (Luke 23:34).

While the congregation ran for safety, Korah, Dathan, Abiram and their families were defiant. They stood in the door of the tabernacle of the congregation waiting for the consequence. They had ample chance to repent but they did not. They hardened their hearts to their own destruction; and, the Scripture was fulfilled in them which says: **“He, that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy”** (Proverbs 29:1).

To prove that God had sent him, Moses revealed what would happen to Korah, Dathan, Abiram and their supporters. That, one, they would die an uncommon death; and, two, he predicted that there would be earthquake which would, **“Swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them”** (Numbers 26:28-30). God honoured the words of Moses and as soon as he had finished speaking, the ground underneath them caved in and swallowed Korah, Dathan, Abiram, their families, houses, goods and the people that took sides with them right in the full glare of the congregation. Not only that, the 250 princes who were by the door of the tabernacle offering incense were devoured by God’s fire of judgment.

At God’s command through Moses, Eleazar the son of Aaron took the censers used by the 250 princes for sacrifice out of the fire. He was also to scatter the fire in the censers away because they were sanctified to God. The censers were to be made into broad sheets for a covering of the brazen altar. This would be a memorial or sign to Israel of the rebellion. It would also remind them that no one outside the sons of Aaron should go near to offer incense before God.

Question 7: Why did God decide again to destroy the children of Israel after the tragic event?

Just a day after the judgment of God on the disobedient people, the whole congregation began to murmur against Moses and Aaron accusing them of killing those that died in the rebellion. They faulted divine justice and judgment. Like a mob, they gathered around Moses and Aaron saying, **“Ye have killed the people of the LORD”** (verse 41). This showed that they had no genuine fear of God in their hearts. The Lord wasted no time in dealing with this new rebellion also. God does not condone sin wherever it is found, whether among leaders or the congregation. He is of purer eyes and cannot look on iniquity (Habbakkuk 1:13).

There was plague among the people which killed more than fourteen thousand of them before Moses and Aaron intervened. Aaron stood between the dead and the living and stayed the invisible hand of judgment. Believers have the sacred duty of interceding for others so that the mercy of God can reach them while they are alive before they are snatched away by the cold hands of death. **“And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none”** (Ezekiel 22:30).

Many souls were lost to the **“gainsaying of Korah”** (Jude 11). A leader’s sin is a leading sin. Those appointed by God to lead others should avoid acts that could

bring God’s judgment upon themselves and the people. God is both a God of mercy and of judgment. All who truly repent can be saved.

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING

EVENING

MON	James 1-2	Deuteronomy	23-24	
TUE	”	3	”	25-26
WED	”	4-5	”	27
THUR	I Peter	1-2	”	28
FRI	”	3-4	”	29-30
SAT	”	5	”	31
SUN	2 Peter	1-2	”	32

Lesson 394

AARON’S ROD BLOSSOMS

MEMORY VERSE: “And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron” (Hebrews 5:4).

TEXT: Numbers 17:1-13

he previous chapter reveals the rebellion in the camp of Israel led by Korah, Dathan and Abiram. The authority of Moses was challenged by these Israelites who were of the opinion that Moses’ actions were not from God but from his human mind (Numbers 16:30). God saw the need to check the actions of the rebels because “...every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand” (Matthew 12:25). There was no way a divided nation of Israel could confront the “seven nations

greater and mightier than” them (Deuteronomy 7:1). It became imperative for God to deal decisively with their attitudes of murmuring and complaining. For complete elimination of all murmuring in the future about the holder of the office, God initiated and wrought a miracle which was of a remarkable character and permanent duration. And to silence all those who were given to murmuring, everyone was made to make input of producing a rod, and thus, they were made to have a direct and special interest.

SOME CAUSES OF MURMURING AND CARNAL COMPETITION (Numbers 17:1-5; Acts 6:1-4; Matthew 20:20-28; Genesis 13: 8-9; Numbers 12:1-8).

It was a great privilege to be the priest of God and many of the princes of the people earnestly desired it. The power and privileges attached to that office made it highly sought for. God decided to make known, by special miracle whom He had conferred with the honour of priesthood.

Question 1: *Why was divine choice and approval for the leadership of the priesthood necessary at this point in time?*

Although those who rebelled against their overall leader (Moses) had been punished, God still decided to give a sign of approval on Aaron. Each of the twelve tribes of Israel was asked to present a rod with the names of the princes of each family written on them. Aaron represented the family of Levi. The rods were to be placed in the tabernacle of the congregation overnight. **“And it shall come to pass, that the man’s rod, whom I shall choose, shall blossom...”** (Numbers 17:5b). God’s intervention would then **“make to cease... the murmurings of the children of Israel, whereby they murmur against you”** (Numbers 17:5). The proofing test was acceptable to everyone and so the grumbling and murmuring ceased.

Question 2: *Give reasons why people struggle for position in the church.*

The priesthood was an honourable office worth seeking and striving for. They knew that it was a great honour to be employed in the service of God. Yet, the way they went about it appeared that the people contended for it, not because of its sacredness but for the sake of the profit and power that attended the office. Today, it is not anything different. There are those who fight to occupy the post they fancy. But there is no basis for struggling for position in the house of God because “the most High ruleth in the Kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will” (Daniel 4:17). If those seeking for leadership position in the church and the world are willing to serve (Matthew 20:25-28) as prescribed by our Lord, leadership would enhance the standard of the church and the society. Rather than coming in to serve, most of those who are aspiring for leadership position are doing so for selfish reasons. Such people need to be told that leadership comes with great responsibilities. It is true that standing afar off, all that can be seen are the privileges but those who occupy such positions know that there are beasts to fight with, hardship to endure and conflict to overcome. If those with inordinate ambition for leadership think on these things, they might temper their thoughts with some reasoning. Leadership is truly an opportunity to serve. Are those aspiring to leadership

ready to serve? Are they, like Aaron ready for the demands and responsibilities of the position by standing between the dead and living in service?

This requires therefore that everyone should wait patiently for God's time of upliftment, since "**promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south**" (Psalm 75:6). Notice that the idea of presenting rods before God did not originate from Moses, but God. Likewise any leader being challenged by backsliders should not initiate any 'contesting sign' but pray to God who will defend His own.

Question 3: State the root cause of murmuring, complaint and competition among the people of God.

The quest for power usually starts innocently. Uncontrolled, it spirals into intense lobbying. And except God in His miracle of mercy as He has done in this passage, intervenes, the lobbyist often has his way. Such attitude usually springs from a heart filled with covetousness, pride, arrogance and unwillingness to submit to constituted authority. Unfortunately, this habit is common among those who are privileged to be influential like Korah and his gang who were "**famous in the congregation, men of renown**" (Numbers 16:2). Murmuring and competitive spirit, if not stamped out early, spread like wild fire that could engulf the whole congregation and lead to division among the brethren.

Question 4: What is the danger of division in the Church?

A Church exposed to division is in grave danger. First, it weakens its strength. Human and material resources that would have been jointly put to productive use are split into fragments, thereby rendering them less effective. Second, it causes distraction from the heavenly vision and makes the entire assembly vulnerable to the enemy's attack. Third, division in a Church leads to mutual suspicion, fear, hatred and collapse (Matthew 12:25). This is the reason all members of the Church must unite with the leadership to fight Satan and his cohorts, the common enemies of the church. In the same breadth, leaders should emulate the New Testament examples of the Lord Jesus and His apostles in handling cases of murmuring and quest for power (Matthew 20:20-28; Acts 6:1-4). Where this does not bring sanity, appropriate disciplinary measures should be meted out to perpetrators to serve as deterrent to others. "**Them that sin rebuke before all that others also may fear**" (1 Timothy 5:20).

DIVINE SELECTION AND SIGN OF APPROVAL (Numbers 17:6-8; John 1: 33; Acts 13:2; Isaiah 7:14; Acts 1:23-26; 13:2)

God had been in the business of appointing leaders over His people from time immemorial. Selection of people to leadership position in the Church is and must be different from the way it is done in the world. Whereas selection or election into positions of responsibilities in the world is by popular vote and intense political campaign, appointment into position of leadership in the church must follow divine choice. Even when a man is to appoint another man, the onus is on the part of that man to ask God for guidance and pray like Moses. "**And Moses spake unto the Lord, saying; let the Lord, the God of**

the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation” (Numbers 27:15,16).

Where choice of church leadership is based on favoritism, partiality, tribalism, ethnicity and economic status rather than on the leading of the Spirit, it will not attract God’s blessing. For our church to stand the test of time in the doctrine of holiness, it must continue its appointment into leadership offices on divine guidance.

The approval of Aaron for the priest’s office made the three topmost leaders (Moses, Aaron and Miriam) over Israel children of the same parents (Micah 6:4). God’s ways are different from man’s ways and none can question Him for His choice of leaders. Of the 12 apostles, James and John were blood relations like Peter and Andrew. In fact, these two together with Philip were from the same city (Mark 1:17-19; John 1:44).

That we are in a dispensation of grace has not changed the fact that God is primarily involved in appointing people to position of leadership in His church. The style may have changed but the standard remains unchanged. We have the Holy Spirit, the Bible and anointed ministers of God as guides on such sensitive matters. God can use a higher leader to appoint other lower leaders. Paul appointed Titus and instructed him to do same (Titus 1:5-9). In fact, the scripture has outlined the essential qualifications for leadership (1 Timothy 3:1-12).

Question 5: *What lesson can we learn from Aaron’s rod that blossomed yielding almond fruits?*

God made Aaron’s rod not only to blossom but also to produce almonds. This shows that the chosen leaders of God’s people are expected to be fruitful and productive (John 15:1-7). Also, Aaron’s rod blossoming foreshadowed Christ’s resurrection. Like the rod which budded and blossomed, Christ, in resurrection life and glory, divinely attested that He is the true Saviour-Priest of men.

DIVINE CHOICE ACCEPTED (Numbers 17:9-13; Matthew 10:40; Acts 6:3-5; Luke 15:17-19; John 1:8-9; Acts 9:6)

Question 6: *State the lessons from the outcome of the rods presented to God.*

Each rod had a name written on it and they were all kept together with a mark of approval predetermined before the presentation was done. God was fair to all. Also, Moses did not deliberately place Aaron’s rod in a special advantageous position. No one could accuse Moses of partiality and favoritism. Leaders, in the church and at home, should exhibit love and fairness to everyone. Everybody should be given equal opportunity to develop spiritually.

Also, the congregation should learn to accept whosoever God has appointed as leader over them bearing in mind that **“He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me”** (Matthew 10:40). And as long as the leadership is sure of God’s leading in the appointment of other leaders, dissenters in spite of their envy and bitterness, should not be allowed to distract the necessary attention that God’s work demands. In any

GOD'S PROVISION FOR THE PRIESTS AND LEVITES

MEMORY VERSE: “And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation” (Numbers 18:21).

TEXT: Numbers 18:1-32

t the end of the previous chapter, the children of Israel had complained of the danger of drawing near the tabernacle of the Lord. They expressed fear that the tabernacle, which was supposed to be an object of their joy and glory, had become their terror and ruin (Numbers 17:12,13). In response to this complaint, God here divinely arranges that Aaron, the high priest and his sons should approach the tabernacle as representatives of the children of Israel so as to bear their iniquities. They were to appear on behalf of the congregation and not suffer death upon the people. This was done so that their fellowship with God can be maintained through the mediation of the priests, assisted by the Levites.

Before now, God had put a great deal of honour upon Aaron: his rod alone had budded and blossomed in the midst of the rest of the princes' rods. Lest he be puffed up with the abundance of God's favour bestowed on him, God comes to remind him of the burden of bearing the iniquities of the children of Israel and his responsibilities in the high priestly office. By these, he would see no reason to be puffed up but to accept his conferment with reverence and godly fear.

Considering the enormity of this charge, God immediately chose the entire tribe of Levi to assist Aaron and his sons. In this, we learn that God understands the measure of our strength and commitment in His vineyard and would not lay on us greater responsibility than we can bear.

Question 1: *What is the encouragement we have in taking up positions of responsibility in the house of God?*

Interestingly, the Lord also specifies the benefits and blessings that go with the responsibilities of the priests and the Levites. This assures us that God has not called us to serve Him in vain. In this study, we shall observe the legal regulations concerning the distinct work and service of the priests and Levites, and the revenues attached to their services.

THE DUTIES OF THE PRIESTS AND LEVITES (Numbers 18:1-7; 3:6-8; 4:24-27; Leviticus 10:1,2; Numbers 16:35; Leviticus 16:12; 22:10).

“And the Lord said unto Aaron, Thou and thy sons and thy father's house with thee shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary: and thou and thy sons with thee shall bear the iniquity of your priesthood” (Numbers 18:1).

Aaron and his sons constituted the priesthood; they had an oversight function over the services of the sanctuary.

Question 2: Differentiate between the duties of the priests and the Levites.

To Aaron and his sons were committed the service of the sanctuary and the altar: to bear the iniquity of the priesthood and of the people, and the Levites were to assist them to take care of everything about the tabernacle. Through the duty of the priests and the Levites, they were held responsible for any offences or desecration of the tabernacle of the Lord. They had to take great care to serve and do what the Lord requires (Leviticus 10:7). They were to note that though they had a high and important office conferred on them by divine design, it was to be a place of great responsibility, diligent care and profound consecration. Leaders and workers in the house of God should know that their calling is a privilege and demands that they serve God with steadfast commitment and diligence.

Question 3: What was the reason for the separation of Levites from other tribes of Israel?

The Levites were separated and set apart from the rest of the tribes of Israel by God so that they could render special spiritual service to Him. The place of their service required a high level of commitment and consecration that warranted their utter separation from routine secular obligations of the rest children of Israel. For instance, they were exempted from the population census carried out by Moses at God's instruction to ascertain the number of men eligible for war in Israel (Numbers 1:47-50). This was to avoid possible distraction and enhance their concentration on their primary assignment.

Aaron was to bring his other brethren, the Levites that they might attach themselves to him and serve him and his sons, before the tent of testimony, and discharge the duties that were binding upon them (Numbers 3:6,7; 8:26). Only they were not to come near to the holy vessels and the altar, for that would bring death upon both of them. The departments of the sacred office to be filled respectively by the priests and Levites were here assigned to each.

The Church of God today consists of various departments and responsibilities. In His wisdom, God has bestowed on His children different degrees of gifts and talents and He requires that we put them to His diligent use. He expects us to serve and remain faithful wherever He has put us, taking heed that we are not found wanting at our duty posts because we are busy with activities that He has not assigned to us.

Strict adherence to the order of service was required of both the priests and the Levites in the discharge of their duties so that they would not incur divine wrath and die in service. Before now, the two sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, had been killed in one day under divine wrath for offering "strange fire" (Leviticus 10:1,2). This sad incident was expected to serve as a deterrent to all the children of Israel who would contemplate breaking the divine rule of acceptable worship and service. Unfortunately, this was not the case. Soon after, the company of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, their families and two hundred and fifty men that offered incense were also consumed for their open rebellion against divinely constituted authority and unlawful burning of incense on the altar (Numbers 16:31-35). So, God specifically cautioned the priests and the Levites to **"keep the charge, and the charge of all the tabernacle; only they shall not come nigh the vessels of the sanctuary and the altar, that**

neither they, nor you also, die. And ye shall keep the charge of the sanctuary, and the charge of the altar: that there be no wrath any more upon the children of Israel” (Numbers 18:3,5).

This office, which brought them into the closest fellowship with the Lord, was a favour accorded them by the grace of God. This is expressed in the words, **“I have given your priest’s office unto you as a service of gift”** (Numbers 18:7). Our involvement in the work of God is a privilege which should not be abused. No man can amount to anything in God’s house except by divine permission. Without Him, we can do nothing.

Question 4: *What lessons do we learn from the delegation of the duties of the priests and the Levites?*

From the assignment of duties to the priests and the Levites, we learn that God appoints the duties of His servants and everyone must be willing to faithfully serve where He has placed him. Those who have the charge of appointing other leaders and delegating responsibilities must do it under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Two, we must know the limits and the boundaries of our ministries and avoid rivalry, contentions and competition. **“And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully”** (2 Timothy 2:5). Three, our privileged positions as ministers in the house of God go with great responsibility of ensuring that the sanctity of the house of God and His altar is preserved. The shepherds of the flock of Christ are answerable for their state at any time. This calls for fear and trembling. Four, the service of the priests and the Levites to the children of Israel is a prototype of Christ’s ministry to the whole world. The children of Israel could not approach directly to the sanctuary; neither could they offer their sacrifices by themselves. In the same vein, we cannot come to God directly on our own merit except through the substitutionary work of Christ. He says, **“I am the way, the truth and the life; no one cometh unto the Father, but by me”** (John 14:6). For any sinner to be accepted by God, he must come through Christ by repentance from sin and faith in His sacrifice. Five, God demands holiness of all who bear His vessels. This was the reason why He told Aaron, **“you and your sons with you shall bear the iniquity of (associated with) your priesthood”**. The priesthood was expected to be pure and void of iniquity.

THE REVENUES OF THE PRIESTS AND LEVITES (Numbers 18:8-23; Leviticus 21:10; 1 Corinthians 9:13,14; Lamentation 3:24).

“And the Lord spake unto Aaron, Behold, I also have given thee the charge of mine heave offerings of all the hallowed things of the children of Israel; unto thee have I given them by reason of the anointing, and to thy sons, by an ordinance for ever” (Numbers 18:8).

The priests’ service is a divine one and no one goes to war at his own charge (1 Corinthians 9:7). As they were appointed to serve the people of God, so were they well provided for so that they may lack nothing that is necessary for living. Those engaged in serving the Lord need to know that God is thinking about and planning for them. He does not wish that His people should serve Him for naught. Believers today are spiritual priests and God has promised to take care of them (Psalm 34:10). Godliness has the **“promise of the life that now is, and**

of that which is to come" (1 Timothy 4:8). As we mind the Father's business, so will He mind our own business also. He cannot afford to neglect those who are faithful in serving Him though there may be delay; but verily, the reward for faithful servants will manifest. This teaches us that believers do not need to cut corners or engage in shady deals in order to make ends meet. God is working for every child of His and will surely turn-in the blessings at their appointed hour.

In reference to the adequate provision made for the priests and the Levites, the Apostle Paul says that "**Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel**" (1 Corinthians 9:14). We infer that it is the duty of Christian churches to maintain their workers and ministers.

In addition to regular provisions for them, the priests and Levites likewise receive money from the redemption of the first-born and those firstlings of cattle which might not be offered in sacrifice. Thus, their maintenance was such as left them altogether disentangled from the affairs of this life. They had no land to till, no vineyards to dress, no cattle to tend, no visible estate to take care of, and yet, they lacked nothing that was necessary for living. The Lord does not want them to be distracted or diverted from ministry in pursuit of what to eat and drink. The ministry requires a whole man. We should not allow the pursuit of the things of this world distract us from our goal of serving the Lord and getting to heaven.

It is of note that the children of Israel were commanded to bring the first and best of their offering from which the priests and Levites were to have their portion (verses 12,13). We must always serve and honour God with the best we have, for He is the best and deserves the best; He is the first, and therefore must have the first ripe fruit. All this is given to the priests "**by reason of the anointing**". It was not for the sake of their personal merits above other Israelites that they had these privileges given to them, but purely for the sake of the office to which they were appointed and it is a "**covenant of salt for ever**" (Numbers 18:19). Salt is used here to depict the incorruptibility and permanence of the covenant.

Question 5: *What encouragement can ministers of God today derive from the providential care of God for the priests and the Levites?*

"And the Lord spake unto Aaron, Thou shalt have no inheritance in their land, neither shalt thou have any part among them: I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel" (Numbers 18:20,23). For the priests and the Levites, the Lord is their part and inheritance. Those that have God for their inheritance and portion have everything and should look at the things of this world with disdain. "**The Lord is my portion, therefore will I hope in him**" (Lamentation 3:24). Heaven is the eternal inheritance of believers and so our treasures should not be laid here on earth.

Seeing how God generously cared and provided for the welfare of all those enlisted in His service, every servant of God today, no matter the degree of involvement in the work of God, should serve with joy and zeal "**for thy work shall be rewarded**" (Jeremiah 31:16). "**Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord. For God**

is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love" (1 Corinthians 15:58; Hebrews 6:10).

THE PLACE OF TITHES AND OFFERINGS IN GOD'S SERVICE (Numbers. 18:24-32; Leviticus 27:30-34; Deuteronomy 14:22; Malachi 3:8-11; 1Corinthians 16:1,2).

"And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service, which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation" (Numbers 18:21). The Levites were the smallest of the twelve tribes of Israel yet, besides all other advantages, they had a tenth part of the yearly profits, without the trouble and expense of ploughing and sowing. Such is the great care God has bestowed on them for their service; not only that they might be well maintained, but that they might be honoured in acknowledgement of the service being rendered to the people of God.

God commanded the children of Israel through Moses to pay their tithes: **"And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree is the LORD'S: it is holy unto the LORD"** (Leviticus 27:30). **"Thou shalt truly tithe all the increase of thy seed, that the field bringeth forth year by year"** (Deuteronomy 14:22). Tithe is the one-tenth of the believer's gross income which he or she should pay to the storehouse of the Lord.

Question 6: *By what means does God maintain His servants on full-time service and fund the gospel course today?*

The purpose of tithes and offerings is primarily for the furnishing of the house of God and sustenance of His ministers. He assigned the tithes of the children of Israel as the wages for the priests and the Levites for he service they rendered. **"But the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer as an heave offering unto the LORD, I have given to the Levites to inherit: therefore I have said unto them, among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance"** (Numbers 18:24). The Church is engaged in evangelistic outreaches, erection of Church buildings, and missionary support. All these require money. Hence, believers should be faithful in paying their tithes and giving generously for the cause of the gospel.

Not even the Levites themselves were exempted from this duty of paying tithes to God. **"And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, thus speak unto the Levites, and say unto them, when ye take of the children of Israel the tithes which I have given you from them for your inheritance, then ye shall offer up an heave offering of it for the LORD, even a tenth part of the tithe"** (Numbers 18:25,26). God required the same obedience both from the leaders and the laities. Failure to do it will amount to robbing God and jeopardizing the cause of the gospel.

Question 7: *What are the consequences of believers' failure to pay their tithes and offerings today?*

True children of God are expected to be faithful to this obligation so that there can be adequate provision for the work of the Lord. Those who fail in this responsibility do so to their own hurt.

Lesson 396

JESUS FORETELLS HIS BETRAYAL AND DENIAL

MEMORY VERSE: “The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born” **(Matthew 26:24)**.

TEXT: John 13: 21-38

One of Christ’s special marks of divinity is His foreknowledge. As omniscient, He knows the future.

He can tell the details of events that will unfold in the near or distant future. He knew that for just thirty pieces of silver Judas would betray Him; He knew that for fear of a damsel or a maid Peter would deny Him. He knows the hearts of men, sinners and saints alike. He knows those who are hypocritical and those who are holy. He knows whether you are playing religion or practising righteousness. He knows when we are spiritually weak or strong, cowardly or courageous, fearful or fearless, humble or haughty. **“Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do”** (Hebrews 4:13). He knows about the sinful schemes and tricks we are carefully hatching under cover and the things we have swept under the carpet. He knows about the secret sins that have not been confessed yet. The Lord knows those who are His, those whom He has forgiven their sins and saved. With Christ’s holy intelligence, it is impossible for any unsaved person to enter His Kingdom.

Question 1: *What was the purpose of the predictions of Jesus Christ?*

These predictions came, not just for the sake of knowledge, but to forewarn both Judas Iscariot and Peter of the consequences of the actions they were about to take. When Christ warns believers against making spiritual shipwreck of their faith while there are no present feelings of danger or during height of spirituality, we, as believers,

must humble ourselves and pray. This is because He knows the future and the plans of the devil. He reveals such satanic schemes ahead of time for saints to take prayer action against the wiles of the devil. **“A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself”** (Proverbs 22:3; 27:12; 14:16). As mere mortals, we know nothing but He knows tomorrow.

DISLOYALTY BY THE SON OF PERDITION (John 13:21-30; 6:64; 12:4-6; Psalm 41:9; Matthew 26:21; Mark 14:18; Luke 22:21).

Judas Iscariot was one of the twelve apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ. Before he betrayed his Master and Lord (John 13:13), he was saved and was one of those that were sent out to preach the gospel. Judas, by virtue of being a treasurer among the twelve, was a prominent figure among the disciples but his heart later became far from the Lord. Earlier in the chapter, the scripture records that Satan dropped the idea of betraying his Master in Judas Iscariot's heart (John 13:2). He did not nip the idea in the bud, and Satan soon overwhelmed him with the idea (John 13:27) until it soon developed into an action of betrayal. He was being tempted and he yielded to it. It is often said that temptation is not sin until the tempted yields to it. This means that we must guard against evil thoughts because they often lead to sin. Judas' action was premeditated. This explains the process of backsliding: it is sequential.

Question 2: *What is betrayal and what should believers do to avoid betraying the Lord Jesus Christ?*

To betray is to hurt somebody who trusts you, especially by not being loyal or faithful to him. It also means to divulge the secrets of a friend to an enemy. Judas was covetous. In one word, he was avaricious. He had both love for money and hatred for parting with it. **“Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein”** (John 12:4-6). Believers today are to beware of covetousness as the scripture warns. **“And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth”** (Luke 12:15)

Question 3: *Name people in the Bible who betrayed the trust reposed in them.*

There had been incidences of betrayal before the act of Judas Iscariot as predicted by Christ in our text. Before the action of Judas, Ahitophel had betrayed the trust David reposed in him; Joab stabbed Amasah to death while calling him **“my brother”**; Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite offered milk instead of water requested by Sisera who was fleeing from Barak, the commander of Israel's army and subsequently killed him while he was asleep in her house; and Demas forsook Paul.

The inference here is that true Christian leaders also suffer betrayal from close associates or people whom they have labored to train physically and spiritually. But the Christian minister need not be discouraged. Christ's attitude during this trying period which He foresaw is what every servant of God should emulate. Those who betray others show by their conduct that they do not have the love of God in their hearts. The negative action of Judas Iscariot did not change Christ's love or His message. He continued with His mission by teaching an all-important message of agape love. In the same way, acts of betrayal should not stop us from preaching the gospel or serving God. We need to rest assured that in spite of the action of Judas Iscariot, some Christians will remain faithful in the face of temptation, trial or persecution.

LOVE: MARK OF TRUE DISCIPLESHIP (John 13:31-35; Romans 13:8-10; 1 Corinthians 13:1-8; Song of Solomon 8:6; Deuteronomy 30:6; Romans 8:35-39)

There is an interlude between Christ's prediction on Judas Iscariot's betrayal and that of Peter's denial. As it were, none of these upcoming negative events had happened. But though He would be the victim of these prophecies, Christ did not allow it to stop His ministry. He used the interlude to emphasize His glorification and to teach His disciples the indispensability of love. He declared that love for one another was a new commandment that He was giving them as a hallmark of their discipleship.

Question 4: *What is the importance of love to the sustenance of the Christian life during difficult time?*

Without love, Christianity becomes an empty profession. Except love takes a firm root in a Christian life, the tides of betrayal and denial could drift such a one from the pathway of righteousness. But as a believer you must bear in mind always that there could be a Judas Iscariot to betray or a Peter to deny. But as long as there is love in your heart, you are sure to stand. It is not as if you will not feel the impact of the betrayal or denial, but true love will help you to absorb the shock and ensure you are not swept off your feet.

Hence, Christ's command to every Christian today to "**love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another**". The yardstick of the believer's love for fellow Christians is Christ's measure of love for him. True love is not in the world, as the devil – the god of this world – has no love and cannot love anyone. The natural man too cannot love as Christ loves, since he does not have Christ in him. The world is full of evils and all kinds of vices: hatred, malice, bitterness, fighting, murder, etc. For instance, to forgive an offence committed against him without planning a methodical revenge is strange to the people of the world. Thus, they would be attracted to believe in Christ and be saved when they see this virtue in any believer because it is not in their own lives. Christ's message prescribes an antidote to betrayal among brethren.

To possess agape love requires that the sinner repents of his sin and receives Christ as Saviour and Lord. There is also the need to pray for sanctification experience as agape love flows uninterrupted from a sanctified heart. This love is a fruit of the Spirit that brings together all other virtues to make the believer perfect in Christ.

None will betray a fellow believer whom he loves as Christ loves him. Nor can anyone deny another believer in critical situation as Christ was if there is this abiding love Christ commands every believer to have and demonstrate. Love is as strong as death - and it does not fail.

DENIAL BY SIMON PETER (John 13:36-38; 18:25-27; Mark 14:29-31, 67-71; Luke 22:33; Matthew 26:69-75).

While a life of duplicity and disloyalty was the bane of Judas Iscariot's failure in ministry, Simon Peter's undoing was his self-confidence; nay, over-confidence. Gifted with spiritual insight (John 6:69), Peter relied on the failing arm of flesh and trusted in himself at a critical moment of his life. He was boastful even in the face of Christ's prediction of the denial. He said, "**Lord, why can not I follow Thee now? I will lay down my life for Thy sake. Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice**" (John 13:37, 38). **Question 5: *What lessons can Christians learn from Peter's denial of Christ despite his boasting to be with Him to the end?***

Many believers still behave like Peter today. Some tell lies in the family, office and other places of business in order to avoid punishment or to acquire wealth. Yet, others prefer to compromise their faith for fear of persecution or loss of privilege. But Jesus

says, “**whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven**” (Matthew 10:33).

From experiences, it is clear that those who boast that they will never deny the Lord are often the first to do so when the temptation comes. This calls for watchfulness and prayer. If believers will be as watchful and prayerful as they are boastful and overconfident, incidents of backsliding will be greatly reduced. Therefore, rather than swelling up in pride, let us humble ourselves before God and pray that He keeps us.

Question 6: Enumerate other moral lessons you learned from our study.

There are other lessons we can learn from today’s study. (i) Judas’ betrayal of Christ was an exercise of his will power and not a matter of destiny (Proverbs 29:1). (ii) Christ-like love is a mark of true discipleship (John 13:34-35; 1 John 3:10). (iii) The Lord also knew much about Judas Iscariot and Simon Peter, He did not stop loving them (John 13:37-38). While we should hate sin like God does, we should still love sinners and pray for those who offend us.

Lesson 397

ENTERING GOD’S ETERNAL KINGDOM

MEMORY VERSE: “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (**John 14:6**)

TEXT: John 14:1-14.

The subject of entering the kingdom of God is crucial to our present happiness and eternal blessedness.

In the heart of every man lies the question on what comes after life on earth, and elicits a more important question, “**what must I do to be saved?**” There is no other place to find answer to this question than in God’s Word.

The experiences of men who had walked with God attest to the validity of God’s Word on the transient nature and mortality of man (Genesis 47:9; Psalm 90:10,15). The Bible affirms this common experience of all men saying that, “**Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble**” (Job 14:1).

God's remedy for man's trouble on earth comes only through the Lord Jesus Christ, who, when He came "**went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil**" (Acts 10:38) and promised eternal rest to all who believe in Him.

Question 1: *What informed Christ's comfort and consolation to His disciples?*

In the passage under consideration, Christ comforts His disciples on account of His imminent departure from them. He declares to them the necessity of His going away and the blessings they stand to enjoy. He also shows them the way into the Kingdom of God and the essence of His relationship with the Father. He concludes by delegating to them authority and power to deal with situations and challenges as may arise in the course of their ministry on earth.

COMFORT AND COURAGE FOR TROUBLED HEARTS (John 14:1-4; 16:33; Isaiah 50:4; Proverbs 16:24; 25:11; Hebrews 11:10; 7:25; Romans 8:24,25)

"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me" (John 14:1). What an assurance it is for anxious and distressed souls to hear the Master say, "**Let not your heart be troubled**". Christ knew the pain which the announcement of His imminent departure would bring on His disciples. He saw the grief in their hearts at the thought of having to face the opposition of those Jews who disagreed with the new faith He has brought. Besides, He must have noticed the gloom in their countenance when He revealed the plot by Judas to betray Him into the wicked hands of the Pharisees and the prediction that Peter would deny Him. In view of these, He took time to assure them of victory in spite of the challenges, grace in place of hardship, comfort instead of pain and joy unspeakable instead of sorrow. He wanted them to know that His departure would be a blessing to them, in life and eternity and that He was going so as to obtain something better for them and, afterward come again to take them home. What a fitting encouragement and assurance for the grieving disciples!

Shepherds over the flocks of God ought to "**...know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary...**" (Isaiah 50:4). They should be able to discern moments when people under their watch ought to be encouraged or rebuked. Leaders should know that there is a time to correct and a time to withhold correction; a time to instruct and a time to encourage those who are in distress or distraught about life. This responsibility of pastors and church leaders are enormous and must be carried out with utmost sense of gravity. They must love the brethren both in word and in deed. By that they would be able to comfort troubled souls, heal wounded hearts and soothe those that are disturbed. The Scripture says, "**Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones**" (Proverbs 16:24; 25:11). Similarly, believers must learn to comfort one another daily as we see Christ's day approaching.

Question 2: *How can we comfort ourselves today?*

To further reinforce the disciples' determination to remain steadfast in the face of challenges and oppositions, Christ assured them that He was going away to prepare mansions for them in His Father's house. It is natural for men to endure all kinds of hardship in a strange land when they remember that a place of rest awaits them at home. People tend to toil with all their heart and will when they know that it would be for a while after which they would be ushered into a place of their own. In like manner, the Lord wanted the disciples to know that they have no continuing city here because they are strangers and pilgrims on earth. They were not to sorrow much, because they would soon depart this temporary and sinful world for a glorious and permanent abode in God's heaven (verse 2).

This word of assurance and comfort from Christ should motivate us to serve the Lord with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our strength knowing that our Master has a place of eternal rest for us. No doubt, there would be varying degrees of challenges, but we must not falter in the face of danger, run away from duty and shirk our responsibilities because of pain since we know that we shall soon enter our rest with the Lord.

Moreover, the Lord's promise of "**mansions**" in His Father's house is meant to draw off their minds from earthly acquirements. He does not want them to be tied down in the quest for things of this world or spend all their time to lay up "**treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal**" (Matthew 6:19). He wanted them, like Abraham, to look "**for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God**" (Hebrews 11:10). Believers today must labour to enter that kingdom that Christ is preparing for them by all means and at all costs.

Question 3: *What hope serves as an anchor for our souls today?*

To cap His message of assurance, Christ told His grieving disciples that after He was done with preparing a place for them, He would come again to take them home. "**And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also**" (verse 3). Christ will come again to take us to be with Him. This first phase of His second coming is what the Church is waiting for; it is called the rapture. It is the catching away from the earth, of all living saints and all who have died in the Lord. At that time, all those who are born again with living, dynamic faith in Christ "**shall be caught up**" "**to meet the Lord in the air**" (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

CHRIST, THE ONLY WAY INTO GOD'S KINGDOM (John 14:5-11; Acts 4:12; 1 Corinthians 3:11; John 6:68; 3:16).

No doubt, many people want to enter into the kingdom of God. Unfortunately, not all will be able because they do not know the way, or they willingly feign ignorance of the way. Like Thomas, they are still asking: "**how can we know the way?**" (verse 5). Our Lord however, did not mince words in answering this question. "**Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me**" (John 14:6). No matter what the opinions of men, He affirms this truth with a note of finality without leaving anyone in doubt about the way to heaven, nor did He leave room for so-called prophets and founders of other religions to deceive people about the sure

way. His affirmation is found in the words: the “**way**”, the “**truth**”, the “**life**”. Christ is not one of the ways, but *the* way; He does not just know or teach the truth, He is Truth; He does not just give life, He is Himself *the* Life. There is no excuse anymore about the way into the kingdom of God or what the truth is or Who it is that gives life. “**Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved**” (Acts 4:12). **Question 4: Why is Jesus Christ the only way to heaven?**

Though there are supposedly many ways by which men attempt to reach God, only through Christ can we have access to the Father. Jesus is the only Way into God’s kingdom. Second, Christ is the way by His exemplary life. His earthly life was a pattern for all who desire to live the perfect godly life. “**For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps**” (1Peter 2:21). Third, Christ is the way by His sacrificial life. He gave His life to redeem us from death. Fourth, He is the way into the fullness of God’s grace and blessing. In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead. Fifth, He is the way by His teaching or doctrine. Peter said: “**Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life**” (John 6:68).

Christ is also the Truth. By this is meant that He is the embodiment of truth and outside of Him there is no truth at all. Men have devised all winds of doctrine whereby they lie in wait to deceive, but only Christ holds the key to all true knowledge. He is not only true in His dealings with men and God, He is the true God. He dwells in the truth, His doctrine is the truth, His messages are full-orbed truths, He propagates the truth and He is Truth personified. He is the sum and substance of the Truth. “**And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth**” (John 1:14).

The Lord crowns His qualifications here with the claim to life. He is the Author of all life, whether natural or spiritual; He created all. As the Source of life, in Him alone we live and have our being. He animates us unto godliness and eternal life. All men without Him are dead spiritually because He is the resurrection and the life. “**For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life**” (John 3:16).

In verses 7-11, Christ establishes essentially that He is the representative of the Father. “**He that hath seen me hath seen the Father**”, He told Philip. Christ is the express image of God, the Father. This means that the Father has been manifested in the incarnation of Christ and those who encounter the Saviour need not ask again to know the Father. Anyone seeking to know how the Father loves, cares and feels in respect of our relationship with Him should come to Christ. He gives to us a preview of our Father in heaven.

This union of the Godhead makes the Father who abides in Christ to speak and work through Him. We receive a challenge here that Christ (1) waited for the Father to speak before speaking. (2) He fixed the gaze of His audience on the Father who works through Him. (3) He has the same purpose with the Father and (4) He obeys the Father in all things. This is the secret of Christ’s successful life and ministry that stems from His abiding relationship with the Father.

CONDITIONS FOR ENTRY INTO THE KINGDOM (John 14:6; 3:1-7; Matthew 1:21; Revelation 21:10-27; Matthew 4:17; Isaiah 55:6-8).

Christ came from heaven in order to save man and show him the way to get there. But all who seek to enter God's kingdom should note that **"there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life"** (Revelation 21:27). Having a mansion in the heavenly kingdom begins by having one's name written in the *Lamb's Book of Life*, the family register of all God's children. Admission into the family of God is by the new-birth experience through repentance and faith in Christ's atoning blood. Repentance entails acknowledgement of sin, confession, and turning away from all iniquity. This is the sure way to enter God's kingdom that many have despised or rejected just because it does not appeal to their mind or correspond with their logic.

Question 5: *What can the sinner do to enter into the kingdom of God?*

To enter God's eternal kingdom requires the new-birth experience. Answering a question from a religious Jew, Christ said: **"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"** (John 3:3). To be born again means to have a change of heart which is possible only through the supernatural act of the Holy Spirit. To have this experience, the sinner must of necessity acknowledge his sinful nature, confess his sins, repent of them and accept the Lordship of Christ.

Man's way of salvation through penance, water baptism, fasting and prayer, tithing or offering, worship of angels or other saints, etc. cannot avail as they are products of his sinful imagination and they are different from God's way (Romans 10:1-4). God calls everyone who seeks to enter His Kingdom to **"forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD"** (Isaiah 55:6-8).

The aspiration of entry into the kingdom of God is the whole essence of Christianity. Let us strive therefore to enter in, for many will seek to enter but shall not be able.

THE CHRISTIAN'S POWER AND PRIVILEGES IN CHRIST (John 14:12-14; Luke 10:19; 11:9; Matthew 21:22; Mark 11:24; John 15:7).

Question 6: *From verses 12-14, mention the privileges we have in Christ.*

The believer who abides in Christ through constant reading, studying and obedience to God's word will experience victory and be fruitful in His service. Such a believer will advance in His relationship with Christ and be able to do greater works. Christ said: **"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. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it"** (John 14:12). This is the sublime essence and blessedness of

entering into God's kingdom through salvation, learning the truths of scripture and living the Christ-like life of abiding in God and exercising faith in Him. Christ in the believer makes him excel beyond his natural ability. He has in him the power that does exceeding abundantly above what he asks or thinks. What a great privilege of prayer Christ has bequeathed to the believer! United with Him, he has the power of attorney: to use His unfailing name to ask for "**any thing**" that is according to His will and provided for by grace. The name of Jesus, conceived in the heart of the Father, is what heaven recognizes and is the basis for the release of the blessings of salvation, sanctification, Holy Ghost baptism, healing, deliverance, gifts of the Spirit, prosperity, and all other desires which we may have according to His will.

The Name of Jesus works wonders in our lives and situations. His name is an authority given to us against the devil, demons and forces of darkness. At His name every knee shall bow. When Peter with John commanded the lame man at the Beautiful gate saying, "**In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk**", it did not fail. Today, believers can receive abundantly above what they ask or think as they call upon the Name of Jesus Christ in truth.

However, it smacks of irreverence to use Christ's name to work miracles without living the kingdom, Christ-like life.

Lesson 398

CHRIST'S PROMISE OF THE COMFORTER

MEMORY VERSE: "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you" (**John 14:16,17**).

TEXT: John 14:15-31.

The thought of Christ's departure from the world had filled the disciples with foreboding. They were apprehensive that their lives and the ministry committed to their care might be in jeopardy if the great Shepherd is taken away from the sheepfold. Hence, Christ devoted the entire chapter fourteen of this book to comforting and preparing their minds against challenges ahead after His departure.

Before now, Jesus had been to His disciples, strength in times of weakness, courage in times of defeat, inspiration in times of failure, help in times of need, succour during temptation, and protection when they were assailed by fear. He therefore needed to assure them that His (physical) departure did not mean desertion; that His imminent ascension would ultimately be to their advantage. He assured them of His eternal presence and protection and promised to send another Comforter that would abide with them forever. He also gave details of the office of the coming Comforter whose abiding presence would sustain them in times of temptations and challenges.

In the discourse, Christ showed His disciples the evidence of those who are His children, profess to love and serve Him and the benefits they stand to enjoy. He also talked of the relationship between Him and the Father. Finally, the Lord leaves behind the legacy of His peace. This was necessary because He was leaving hem in an unfriendly world steeped in violence, turbulence and confusion and only His brand of peace could preserve their faith till He comes again to take them home.

Question 1: *Why was it necessary for Christ to comfort His disciples before His departure from the world?*

THE PROMISE OF THE COMFORTER (John 14:15-20; Mathew 3:11; John 7:37-39; Luke 24:49; Act 1:8).

The ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ was not expected to terminate after His physical departure from the earth, but to be a continuous one. Therefore, the survival of the Church depended largely on the legacy He left behind after His earthly ministry, just like the survival of a building in times of trouble and turbulence depends on the strength of its foundation. To ensure that the Church continued to function unhindered, fulfil her mission on earth and survive the onslaught of the gates of hell, the Holy Spirit was promised as a gift

so as to strengthen and make her more vibrant in the work of evangelizing the world (Matthew 28:18-20; 16:18; Mark 16:15-20).

In preparation for the reception of the Comforter, Christ's disciples were to manifest their love for Him, demonstrated or exhibited through obedience to His commandments. True love for God, according to the Lord is not sentimental but acts of obedience. The proof that a child loves the parents shows in his or her willingness to do what they want. In the same way, obedience to Christ's teachings is the only true evidence of our love for Him. No one can claim true love for the Master who is not committed to serving and doing His will. The idea of a disobedient Christian or a rebellious child of God is contrary to the teaching of the word of God. A Christian whose faith consists only in word does not understand the essence of true Christianity and is a contradiction in terms.

Every child of God is called to obey the Lord even when it is not convenient to do so. Those whose evidence of Christianity consists only in what they say should listen to the Master. **"If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter..."** By this statement, the Lord revealed **that obedience to His word is a prerequisite** to the coming of the Comforter and should be seen as condition for the promise which follows. God's continuous blessings are not without conditions.

Upon the proof of love and obedience, Christ promised to pray to the Father to send **"another Comforter"** that will abide with them forever. The word "another" as used in the original does not suggest something of a copy that is inferior in substance and quality but it means another Person of the same or like kind in power, authority or capability. This puts the Holy Spirit in the same class with our Lord Jesus Christ. He is co-equal with the Father and the Son; He is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent (2 Corinthians 13:14; Matthew 25:29; 1 Peter 1:2). Other words for the Comforter are: helper, advocate, mediator, instructor, strengthener, or defender (of a cause).

Question 2: Point out the reason for "another Person" to take the place of our Lord after His departure.

It was necessary that the Lord should return to the Father after the work of redemption but He needs to equip the emerging New Testament Church to continue His work to the uttermost parts of the earth. If that were to be, there was need for an abiding Person to drive, guide and lead the Church to greater heights. Besides, Christ's physical presence in the midst of the disciples was to them an end of all fright or fear. Hence, the need for Somebody like Himself who would be to them as a compensation to do what He would have done were He to be around. Moreover, He said if He did not go away, the Comforter would not come (John 16:7). He is not to be an occasional helper but abiding One in the Church till Christ comes again.

It is interesting to note that the Holy Spirit had been called **"the promise of the Father"** because God pledged to endue end-time believers with the Spirit in a baptismal measure. Christ's promise here therefore serves to further confirm the outpouring of the Holy Ghost on cleansed, sanctified saints (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4; 2:33).

The promised Spirit is not only referred to as the Comforter, He is also called the Spirit of Truth because He is true, teaches the truth, bears witness to the truth, defends the truth and propagates the truth. He will not teach anything

contrary to the doctrines of Christ. All His revelations will conform with the teachings of Christ. He is not and cannot be the author of error. Apparently,

those who propagate falsehood have not the Spirit which Jesus Christ promised. **“To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them”** (Isaiah 8:20). Only children of God can be indwelt by this Spirit. The world, denoting all unregenerate people cannot have Him because they neither can see nor know Him. They cannot receive Him until they experience the saving grace of Jesus Christ. There must first be cleansing from all sins and the heart purged from the sinful nature (John 3:3,5).

Question 3: *Explain why it was necessary for Christ to go back to heaven after the Cross.*

To underscore further the expediency of the Comforter and prepare the minds of His followers, Christ re-emphasized to them that He was going away. He said: **“Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you”** (John 14:19,20). For His disciples, it was to be a temporary separation to enable Him, first, accomplish His mission of redemption on the cross after which He would resurrect again. Second, to go and prepare a place for them in His Father’s Kingdom so that where He is they also may be (John 14:3). Afterward, He would sit at the Father’s right hand to make intercession for the Church. Third, His departure would enable the Holy Spirit begin His (Spirit’s) work in a fuller measure as it is in the divine plan that each member of the Godhead should be involved in the programme of redemption.

Though He was going away temporarily, the Lord implies that those who are spiritually alive would still see Him with the eyes of faith; they will fellowship and commune with Him in prayer and receive revelations from time to time. And, at the rapture of the saints, they will see and fully understand the relationship between Him and the Father. But Christ will come again to judge those who refuse to accept His message of grace and salvation.

OUR PROOF OF LOVE FOR CHRIST (John 14:15, 21-24; 1 John 4:10,19; Ephesians 2:4)

He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him” (John 14:21).

Question 4: *What marks out a true child of God?*

Our Lord here returns to the subject of love and its manifest proofs. He says that it matters but little what a person professes, but His own seal of approval lies in the degree of the Christian’s obedience to His word. He emphasizes that those who keep His commandments are those who truly love Him, which in turn, qualifies them to carry the badge of true saints. In response to their obedience, they have the following to their advantage: first, the Father would love them, not because He does not love in the first place, but that they deserve

a further affection and privilege from the throne of grace because they are genuine sons and daughters. God's love for the world is incomparable; His love sent His only begotten Son to the Cross to atone for our sins, the Just dying for the unjust that we might inherit eternal life. But those who fear Him enjoy higher fellowship and deeper communion with Him. The psalmist says: "**The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant**" (Psalm 25:14). The beloved apostle puts it this way: "**Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins**" (1 John 4:10). Therefore, those who would enjoy this special privilege must be people committed to obeying the word of God.

Second, Christ Himself vouches greater love for those who keep the Father's commandments. He will do this through answer to their prayers, manifestation of His power on their behalf, revelations of His will, confirmation of His word, and glorification of His name (Mark 16:20). Third, the Godhead (Father, Son and the Spirit) would make their abode in the temple of the believers (verse 23). Fourth, they would enjoy the special privilege of having insight into the things of God.

THE PURPOSE OF THE COMFORTER (John 14:25,26; 15)

"These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:25,26).

Question 5: *Mention the benefits we enjoy when we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit.*

Christ has spoken many things concerning His passion, death and resurrection; He has said many things concerning His teaching and commandments, concerning His Father and the relationship between them. He has said many things concerning the identity of true believers and the privileges they enjoy for being obedient to His word. He has taught His disciples various things pertaining to the kingdom of God. Yet, it is necessary that the Comforter must come. In addition to His ministry as Helper, Strengthener, Comforter, Advocate and Defender of the truth, the Holy Spirit has specific work in the programme of God for the Church. When He indwells believers, first, He quickens our mortal bodies enabling us to serve the Lord with zeal (Romans 8:11). Second, He empowers believers for public and private ministry and equally directs gospel work (Acts 1:8; 8:26-29). The Spirit endues the saints with courage, boldness and power to be authoritative witnesses for Christ. Third, He reproveth the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment (John 16:7,8). He takes Christ's word and impresses it on sinners' hearts, convicting them in the process. Fourth, like Christ, He teaches and guides into all truth (John 16:13). It is notable that some teachings that the disciples of Christ were not able to bear are now being taught by the Holy Spirit. Fifth, He brings to our remembrance all things that Christ has taught. Sixth, He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God (Romans 8:26,27). Seventh, He helps and gives victory in times of temptation. These and many more come through the indwelling influence of the Holy Spirit.

PEACE THROUGH RECONCILIATION (John 14:27; Romans 5:1)

“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27).

Having exhorted them to be of good cheer and prepare for the coming Comforter, Christ invokes His peace upon the disciples. But it was more than mere wishes as was the custom of the Jews: it was a legacy He bequeathed to the Church. And, as legacy, it becomes our heritage and an abiding blessing.

Question 6: *Differentiate between Christ’s peace and the world’s peace.*

This peace from the Prince of peace is **“not as the world giveth”**, it is a distinctive brand of peace that passes all understanding. It can only be experienced by those who turn away from the life of sin and accept Christ’s message of reconciliation and forgiveness. It can only be experienced by those who run to the Saviour from the transient treasures of this world. Worldly peace comes from position, power, pleasure, popularity and they quickly fly away leaving in their trail worry, anxiety, disquiet and distress. People without Christ live in crises.

Christ also left for us the gospel of peace by which means men are reconciled to God. It is a vehicle of reconciliation between the righteous God and sinful man. The gospel is a medium of bringing those who were enemies of God by wicked works in a living relationship with the Father **“For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us”** (Ephesians 2:14). **“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”** (Romans 5:1). Those who trust Him today will inherit His abiding peace.

Lesson 399

THE VINE AND ITS BRANCHES

MEMORY VERSE: "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing" (**John 15:5**).

TEXT: John 15:1-27.

ur text draws attention to the centre point of relationship between the believer and the Lord. No doubt, believers' relationship with Christ is central and pivotal to their fruitfulness and security, and life ceases to flourish when it is detached and isolated from its source. His continuous use of the words 'I, me, you, ye, my words, my Father, my friends' in this direct address to His disciples then and now inspires us to learn more from Him.

In the Old Covenant, God had established a similar relationship with His chosen people Israel but they failed to bear good fruits. Whereas they were planted "**a noble vine, wholly a right seed**", they "**turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine**" because of their sins. As a result, they were rejected (Jeremiah 2:21; Isaiah 5:1-7). It was for this reason that the Gentiles were grafted in to the stock. It is therefore necessary that believer's be wary of the mistake of the Jews in their relationship with the Husbandman who would not hesitate to hew it down. "**Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee**" (Romans 11:20,21).

This truth renders baseless and unscriptural the doctrine of eternal and unconditional security. Believers must be alerted to the peril of straying away from Christ. The pathway to recovery from the grave consequences of spiritual detachment from Christ is repentance and re-union with Him through faith and implicit obedience to God.

CHRIST: THE TRUE VINE (John 15:1; John 14:6; 10:30; Matthew 3:17; John 8:29; Matthew 22:16; Mark 12:14; 1John 5:20)

"**I am the vine...**" As the vine is a fruitful plant with little pomp, so is Christ. "**He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not**" (Isaiah 53:2,3). Like the vine is useful for fruit-bearing, and brings forth both plenty and variety of sweet fruit to make the heart of men glad: so are the fruits of Christ's death, resurrection, ascension, and intercession many, delightful and sweet.

Pure, perfect and pleasing to God, Christ is the true vine. As a vine yields proper juice and nourishment to all the branches, whether they are large or small, so Christ is the true source of life and fruitfulness to every believer. And as the nourishment of each branch and tendril passes through the main stalk, or in this case, the vine, so Jesus is the source of all real strength and grace to His disciples. As the Leader and Teacher, He imparts to them as they need, grace and strength to bear the fruits of holiness. He desires all believers to bear fruits and live fulfilling and satisfying lives as branches in the vine.

Christ added that His **“Father is the husbandman.”** He it is who engrafts and implants all the branches into this vine. A Bible scholar says, “the plants of righteousness are of his own planting; he takes notice what store of fruit every branch doth bring forth: and it is His daily care to dress and dung, to purge and prune, to support and shelter, His vineyard, that it may bring forth fruit abundantly.” He adds, “the Husbandman’s hand manages the pruning knife of affliction [for] His people’s improvement in grace and holiness: He had rather see his vine bleed, than see it barren.”

Question 1: What do we learn from Christ’s unbroken and vibrant relationship with God?

Christ maintained an unbroken fellowship with the Father through unceasing life of prayer, unquestionable obedience and loyalty, and selfless life of service to God and man. His entire life reflected a consistent pattern of submission and obedience to God. His life was pleasing to God the Father (Matthew 3:17; John 8:29). Our lives, as believers, ought to be as pleasing to God. If believers follow in the footsteps of Christ, living a life of obedience and faith, then they will receive divine approval and commendation. In a world of growing decadence and corruption, we must play our roles as salt and light in the midst of darkness (Matthew 5:13-16).

CHRISTIANS AS FRUITFUL BRANCHES (John 15:2-5; Acts 11:26; Galatians 5:22,23; Ephesians 5:8-11; Philippians 1:8-11; 4:8; Colossians 1:9-11; 1 Thessalonians 2:2-10; 2 Peter 1:5-8)

Question 2: As branches in the vine, what kind of fruits are believers expected to bear?

The believers are fruitful branches in the vine. Those who profess relationship with Christ must show it by their lifestyle which must reflect in distinct and unmistakable terms, the character of Christ (Acts 11:26). As the gardener cuts off the unfruitful branches of the vine, so does the Father sever unfruitful branches from His Son. But the **“branch that beareth fruit, he”** prunes and dresses so that they may be more healthy and fruitful. In the same way, the Father purges, cleanses, purifies, frees from sin, and removes everything that might hinder their increasing fruitfulness. Those who are fruitful to the glory of God will have the hindrances taken away from them so they can remain fruitful.

Question 3: From our text, state three categories of Christians and describe each of them. Which group do you belong to?

This is God’s unchanging standard. Three categories of Christians stand out clearly in the text. One, *Fruitless Branches*: These are barren believers. This category of Christians can be regarded as mere professors of faith in Christ without corresponding good works. They are people whose religion do not go beyond verbal accent. Though they bear Christian names, identify with a vibrant church, and partake in all the external forms of religion, they have no personal heart commitment to Christ and His words. These are dead branches, people who have no evidence by their lives that they are truly united to the Lord Jesus. Since they are unprofitable branches, they will be justly removed. These are the ones who are satisfied to remain at the same level of their spiritual attainment for a long time, being unmindful of the Spirit’s gentle pleading saying, **“Ye have dwelt long enough in this mount”** (Deuteronomy 1:6-8; Hebrews 5:11-14; 6:1-3). Present Christianity is crowded with so many sluggish, lukewarm and self-satisfied believers at their comfort zones. The believers should rise up and press forward for higher callings.

Two, *Fruitful Branches*: These are all true believers who, not only have fruit-bearing capacity but also actually bring forth fruit. Being fruitful is an indication that we are under the influence of Christ, and that His life produces its appropriate effects in us. It also means being useful to others. Just like a vineyard is worthless except it is so fruitful that it promotes the happiness or subsistence of the community, so the Christian principle would be valueless unless Christians live in such a way that others may be made holy and happy by their example and labours, and to the extent that the world may be brought to the cross of the Saviour.

Three, *More Fruitful Branches*: These are believers with great capacity for spiritual growth and fruitfulness as a result of pruning. Their spiritual growth and fruitfulness are products of intense devotion to Christ and His Word. Though the highway into this experience is opened to every pilgrim, only very few desire, aspire and perspire to travel there. To join this triumphant throng, there must be intense desire and longing for intimacy with Christ; ardent craving for deeper experience of God's grace and power. It also requires decision of faith, devotion of heart, discipline and determination to get there. Once the believer's mind is made up to be fruitful in righteousness, soul-winning and good works, there must also be a readiness for continual purging for further fruitfulness and usefulness in the Kingdom. More faithfulness leads to more fruitfulness.

CONSEQUENCES OF DETACHMENT FROM CHRIST (John 15: 6-9; 2 John 9; Acts 27:31; John 5:38; Psalm 91:1; Hebrews 10:35-39; 2 Peter 2:20-22; Revelation 2:1-5; 3:14-19)

Question 4: *What does it mean to get detached from Christ and what are the consequences?*

The measure of a believer's fruitfulness is the index of his consistent, continual abiding in Christ. Believers derive their grace, strength and power from Christ and can only be sustained by dwelling in Him always. The detachment of any believer from Christ will spell doom, disaster and eternal death.

As severing a branch from its sustaining stem means death and cessation of life, the severed member will not only cease to bear fruits but will be rendered irrelevant. To be separated from Christ and by extension His presence, power, preservation, provision, purpose, partnership and parenthood is a dreadful thing beyond description. It would have been better not to have known Him at all than to experience the heartache and heartbreak of a severed relationship (2 Peter 2:22).

The following are some of the implications of a severed relationship with Christ. One, there will be personal limitations (John 15:4,5; Acts 27:28; Luke 5:4-7; Colossians 2:10). The believer's capacity to bear fruit is derived and not intrinsic. When believers abide in Christ, the power and potency to bear fruits come naturally but the fruitless branch will be rendered impotent of any capacity to bear fruits. Two, absence of the pre-eminence and indispensability of the indwelling Christ for triumphant living will lead to lack of a bulwark of defense in warfare (John 15:5; Romans 8:37).

Third, the believer's life will cease to flourish with meaning and sense of purpose when he ceases to abide in Christ. Gross darkness, misery, poverty and withdrawal of the privilege to answered prayer (John 15:7,16) are the lot of a life that is detached from Christ. God appreciates and celebrates the fruitfulness of His Church but abhors its barrenness.

Every severed, fruitless soul will not only be "**cast off**", he will also get "**withered**" for lack of nourishment; it will even lead to a situation where "**men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.**" Only genuine repentance, restitution and faith in His atonement can re-unite such people with Him again.

CONTINUITY IN LOVE AND COMFORT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN SPITE OF OPPOSITION (John 15:9-14,18-27; 13:34,35; 16:33; Matthew 10:22; James 4:4)

Continuing in Christ's love is a priority for all believers. There is no alternative to doing that. Christ, in His love towards us, offered to die for our sins in order to make us part of His Body. It becomes our duty, therefore, to love one another just as Christ loves us; and this love must be sacrificial. There are several ways the practical sacrificial love may be practised. It may just be to give a listening ear to the lone member of the Body of Christ, to encourage the discouraged brother/sister, to render help to the helpless, to visit the bereaved or orphans, or to give. We do not need to travel many kilometers before we see people who need our love; they are among us. If we look with the eyes of love, we will discover them.

Lessons abound for the believer in the declaration of the Lord Jesus Christ. First, we learn that He has given full and ample demonstration of His great and wonderful love unto His church. Second, we learn that it is the duty of every believer to continue in that love, and to dutifully preserve the sweet sense of Christ's love in their hearts. The most potent and powerful way to be a witness in a world of hatred is to continue in Christ's love.

Christ's charge to continue in His love in spite of the hostility in the world is a challenge which the believers must daily strive to accomplish. Since the world is hostile, there is need for Christians to be loving and supportive of one another. This is what will bolster them during discouragement and opposition. The world and worldlings cannot do better than the one they are taking after. Hatred is part of the lifestyle of the unbeliever; so, if he hates the believer for no just cause, we can find reason in the fact that they also hated our Lord and Saviour. If the world hates God and Christ, there is no way they will not hate true believers also. There is no justification for the hatred of the world toward God, the Father and Christ, the Son, though. One of the proofs of our union with Christ is our willingness to suffer persecution as a result of our identification with Him.

Question 5: *How can we witness effectively in a world of hostility?*

All believers can enjoy the comfort and fellowship of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Beside the encouragement we derive from one another, the Holy Spirit strengthens believers to endure the unreasonable hatred and hostility the world have towards Christ and Christians. The comfort of the Holy Spirit comes in handy and helpful especially "When the days are dreary and the long night weary". He comes with His counsel when the believer is confused, comforts when he is disheartened and fellowships when the believer is feeling lonely. The illumination, inspiration, unction and power of the Holy Spirit are indispensable for dynamic, resourceful and fruitful soul-winning. We must determine to abide in Christ, constantly living in His presence, obeying His Word and sharing His love with others. Then, we can be sure our lives will be fruitful.

THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

MEMORY VERSE: “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you” (**John 14:26**).

TEXT: John 16:1-33

In a previous lesson, we considered Christ’s comforts to His disciples with the promise of the Holy Spirit who is also the Comforter of the Church. According to Christ’s promise, when the Holy Ghost came, He would not only abide with the believers for ever but would also be in them. Described as **“the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive”**, who already **“dwelleth with”** them and should **“be in”** them, there are purposes for which the Holy Spirit came upon the Church. So, in this study, we shall be examining in detail, what benefits His coming means for the world, individual Christians and the Church. Although His powerful ministry was not fully revealed to God’s people until the incarnation of Christ and later at Pentecost (Acts 2) the Holy Spirit as the infinite Living God indwells the hearts of believers. The person, presence and the ministry of the Holy Spirit are unimaginably indispensable in the life of the Church and the individual believer (John 15:26; 16:7,15) who desires to live a fulfilled life in the Kingdom.

Without the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the best the Christian enjoys of the Lord is comparable crumbs that drop from the master’s table: there is so much more to benefit from His ministry that the Christian believer cannot afford to miss out of the abundance. However much you have enjoyed or benefited of the Spirit, there is room for more. Since He is one of the three divine Personalities of the Godhead, He is inexhaustible. This is why each of us must take another plunge into the Spirit and enjoy the benefits of His ministry.

THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT TO BELIEVERS DURING PERSECUTION (John 16:1-6; Matthew 5:10-12; 9:22,34; 12:42; Acts 8:1; 9:1; 26:9-11; John 14:16-20,26; Matthew 10:17-20)

Jesus Christ graphically reiterated His earlier prediction of hatred, repugnancy and persecution that would be visited on the believers by the world and the worldlings. He declared that persecution would be so commonplace that persecutors of believers would think they are serving God: **“yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service”** (John 16:2). This implies that apart from denial of fundamental human rights of believers, martyrdom would result from some of the persecutions. This is no longer news as much has been heard of the persecutions that has led to the death of so many Christians as a result of their faith in the Lord.

A close look at our passage today suggests that most of the persecution will originate from professed religious people who will constitute themselves into hostile enemies of the true gospel of Christ (verse 2). In other words, persecution will be masterminded by those who are supposedly aware of

Christ's mission on earth. Opposition from hostile religious authorities and the apostate church in our contemporary times may take the form of denominationalism, ecumenism and religiosity without adherence to the revealed teaching of the scripture. This does not rule out the fact that people of the other religions will not persecute believers in Christ; they certainly will.

Question 1: *What is the main reason behind the believer's persecution?*

The uncompromising stand and the holy lifestyle of Christ's disciples, which clearly distinguished them from the unbelieving world, would be the primary cause of their persecution. Another fundamental reason for the persecution is ignorance of the true righteousness of God. Hence they persecute the righteous ones. Unfortunately enough, some religious people will be involved in the evil business of persecution of true believers. This is because they do not have the Spirit of truth who testifies to the truth of God in Christ; and brings people toward repentance and faith. This underscores the fact that persecution is an unavoidable experience of every true believer. **"Yea all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution"** (2 Timothy 3:12).

Question 2: *What are the roles of the Holy Spirit amidst the persecution of the saints?*

In any case, Christ's prediction of the times of distress and persecution that awaited the Church was immediately accompanied with His promise of the Comforter. He will not abandon His own during persecution. The soothing balm for the persecuted New Testament believer and church is the presence and ministry of the promised Comforter, that is, the Holy Spirit. During persecution of saints He comforts them.

This He does by standing for them as the Advocate. As an Advocate, He does not only defend but also guides the utterances of saints under trials. **"I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you."** **"But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you"** (John 14:16,18; Matthew 10:19,20).

THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT TO THE WORLD THROUGH THE BELIEVER (John 16:7-11; Zechariah 12:10; Acts 2:37; 16:29,30; John 8:9,46; 1 Corinthians 14:24; Jude 15)

A Bible scholar writes of the convincing work of the Spirit thus: "The Spirit convinces of the fact of sin, that we have done so and so; of the fault of sin, that we have done ill in doing so; of the folly of sin, that we have acted against right reason, and our true interest; of the filth of sin, that by it we are become odious to God; of the fountain of sin, the corrupt nature; and lastly, of the fruit of sin, that the end thereof is death." It is after the Spirit reveals the depravity and degeneracy of the sinner that the sinner feels guilty, seeks to be saved and cries out, **"what must I do to be saved?"** (Acts 16:30).

Question 3: Why does a believer or minister of the gospel need the backing of the Holy Spirit in his ministrations?

The Spirit of God works mightily by convicting men of sins. This He does sometimes through the lifestyle or preaching of the word by believers, or in His own way. When He convinces sinners of sin, He does not just tell them of it, He proves it to them until they own up on those sins. An example of this was when the religious people of Jesus day brought a woman they caught in adultery to Christ and wanted to know what judgment He would pass on her. After Christ had spoken, the religious hypocrites were convicted. **“And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst”** (John 8:9).

Another example of the convicting power of the Holy Spirit was on the day of Pentecost where the listeners to Apostle Peter’s spontaneous sermon could not argue against the word though he laid the truth harshly on them. At the end of the sermon, the people yearned to be saved because they were not only held spellbound by the message, but also they were under conviction of the Spirit. **“Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost”** (Acts 2:37,38). Because the message was understandable and clear, the hearers could not but ask relevant questions; because it was authored by the Spirit, the listeners could not but follow the dictates of purpose of the Spirit; and because it met the need, the people could not but respond positively.

Whenever the believer or minister of the gospel ministers through the Spirit, the effect of the word must be felt by the listener as effects of fire is felt. **“Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?”** (Luke 24:32). This experience can be the experiences of ministers in places where the gospel is currently being resisted. True servants of God will not despair or give up until they see that breakthroughs akin to that of the apostles are replicated in their sections or areas of ministry.

THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT TO THE BODY OF CHRIST (John 16:12-33; 15:26; 14:26; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11)

The ministry of the Spirit includes convincing men of sin, inspiring believers with knowledge of all truth and supplying instruction and consolation to all Christians. Just as the Spirit of God convinces and humbles the unbelieving world, He instructs and comforts His servants and agents.

The Holy Spirit plays a vital role in God’s redemptive purpose as revealed in the scripture. Without the Holy Spirit there would be no creation of the universe and no human race (Genesis 1:2; Job 33:4). Similarly, without the Holy Spirit there would be no Bible (2 Peter 1:21) and consequently no faith (Romans 10:17), no power to proclaim the gospel (Acts 1:8; Micah 3:8), and no new birth (John 3:5, 6) and no purification of heart (Acts 15:9).

Question 4: Enumerate some specific areas of ministry the Spirit of God helps believers.

The Holy Spirit directs believers in various ways. But specifically, He orders the steps of a good man in the area of evangelism. He directed Philip to join the chariot of the Ethiopian Eunuch and preach to him (Acts 8:29); He speaks to the church on areas of ministry He would want Barnabas and Saul to be involved (Acts 13:2); He restrained Paul and his companion from preaching in regions that were not ready for the gospel message (Acts 16:6,7); and permitted them on places to go and minister (Acts 16:10). All these He still does today as we depend on Him. He also leads believers (Romans 8:14), warns them ahead of dangers (1 Timothy 4:1), comforts them when there are challenges (John 16:7), reproves them when they go astray (Micah 3:8; John 16:8), gives inspiration to them when they embark on tasking assignments and illuminates their minds to take wise decisions in perplexing situations (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21) and intercedes for them (Romans 8:26).

Question 5: Identify the activities of the Holy Spirit in the Old and New testaments.

In the Old Testament, the ministry of the Holy Spirit among God's own people was a privileged blessing of a few people among the nation of Israel. Thus, the ministry was not available for "**all flesh**" as it is in the New Testament. It was not even all Israelites but selected ones that were filled with the Holy Spirit (Numbers 11:25-29). There were, however, instances of those who were selected and equipped for the service of God. Examples are Joseph who became a useful tool in the preservation of his family, the nation of Egypt and the surrounding world (Genesis 41:38). Another was Bezaleel and Aholiab who, through the power of the Spirit put up an excellent architectural masterpiece of the tabernacle (Exodus 31:1-11). Other examples include Gideon (Judges 6:34) Jephthah (Judges 11:20) and Samson (Judges 14:5-6; 15:14-16). But in the New Testament, the promised pouring of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh is fulfilled.

Question 6: What other roles does the Holy Spirit play in the body of Christ?

The Holy Spirit is seen as the Spirit of New Life. As the agent of salvation, the Holy Spirit convicts and brings the sinner to repentance. He reveals the truth about Jesus (John 14:6,16,24; Acts 4:12), regenerates a new life in the penitent sinner who believes and accepts Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour (John 3:3-6). By implication, at conversion every believer receives the Holy Spirit to become partaker of the divine nature of Christ in a measure (John 20:22; 2 Peter 1:4). The Holy Spirit testifies to their sonship of God. Second, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Righteousness. As He indwells believers, the Spirit goes further to cleanse, purge, purify and sanctify the heart of consecrated ones who seek this definite experience by prayer of faith (Acts 15:9; 2 Thessalonians 2:13). When this blessed experience is received, the believer is enabled for victorious daily Christian life (Luke 1:74,75). This should spur you as a believer

to not stay at the low level of salvation but to press forward to the prize of holy calling and get sanctified.

Third, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Power. At this point, the sanctified believer presses further to receive the enduement, or the empowerment of the Holy Spirit known as Holy Spirit baptism. This experience produces a dynamism, effectiveness, boldness and power to witness for Christ (Luke 24:4; Acts 1:8; 2:4). The initial evidence of this experience is speaking in tongue. Usually accompanying this experience is the impartation of spiritual gifts for the ministry (1 Corinthians 12:1-12) and office gifts (Ephesians 4:11; 1 Corinthians 12:28-31) and confirms the gospel with signs and wonders.

Therefore, those who are merely speaking in tongues without accompanying power will do themselves a whole world of good if they truly examine themselves to know the 'spirit' they have received, and go back to God for the true enduement if necessary. In fact, there is need for continual renewal of this endowment for effectiveness. Fourth, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of fellowship. It is the Holy Spirit that incorporate believers into the body of Christ and builds them into an organic wholeness (Ephesians 2:22). He also gives revelation, inspiration, illumination (Philippians 3:3); He directs the mission of the body of Christ (Acts 13:2, 4), appoints and ordains leaders for God's work, guard the gospel against error (2 Timothy 1:4). Five, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of prayer and intercession. We need the assistance of the Holy Spirit not only to pray aright but also to pray effectively (Romans 8: 26).

Lesson 401

TOTAL FREEDOM FROM SIN

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

TEXT: 1 John 3:1-10

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

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

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

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

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

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

In love, He makes sinners to become his sons/daughters. Though the scripture declares that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; and that the wages of sin is death, God planned man's salvation even while the sinner is still relishing his sinful pleasures. This was the reason He gave us the greatest gift on earth. **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life”** (John 3:16).

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

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

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

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

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

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

communication line through which he can receive more grace for abundant and victorious Christian living. Thus set free from sin, the believer is to seek to fit into the mould of Christ, to be conformed to His life of righteousness as the express image of the Almighty God.

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

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

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

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

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

(John 5:14; 8:11). Obviously, His death and resurrection place us on a higher spiritual platform to live a life of complete freedom from sin.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Christ was “**manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.**” Jesus Christ came to the world to save sinners. His entire mission was opposed to sin. To sin is to render the death of Jesus useless, to run counter to His holy nature and to prove that we do not know Him. “**He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.**”

Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God” (1 John 3:8,9). Those who sin belong to the devil. A true believer **“doth not commit sin”**. Sin is so strange to saints that they cannot speak a sinful word or act in a sinful manner. A true child of God cannot touch sin. **“He cannot sin because he is born of God”**. He has been **“renewed... after the image of him that created him in true holiness”**. He is so filled with the nature of God that he cannot sin. Therefore, those who sin cannot claim that they belong to God.

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

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

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

Those who are totally set free and who hope to see the Lord on the last day do not only possess the experience of sanctification but also keep watching, examining and purifying themselves in preparedness for the imminent return of our Lord so as to be found worthy to enjoy the promised inheritance of saints in heaven.

“And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure... dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

Lesson 402

LOVE AND UNITY IN THE CHURCH

MEMORY VERSE: “Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (**Ephesians 4:3**).

TEXT: John 13:34, 35; 1 John 4:7-12, 16-21; Psalm 133:1-3.

The Bible declares that God is love. He lived up to His name by giving His only begotten Son to die for man’s salvation from sin. And those who taste of this incomparable love through repentance and faith in Christ’s sacrificial death do not remain the same: they are regenerated, and by implication, called out of sin and the world to live a new life of righteousness by the grace of God. This spiritual transformation makes the erstwhile sinner who has a current experience of salvation a member of the body of Christ, referred to as the Church. The Church is a group of people called out of the world through the experience of salvation in Christ’s death and resurrection.

THE CORD AND POWER OF LOVE IN THE CHURCH (John 13:34,35; 1 John 4:7-12, 16-21; Romans 13:8,10; 1 Thessalonians 4:9; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:10,11,15; 4:7; Galatians 5:22,23)

Question 1: *How can the sinner have the love-nature of God in him?*

Redeemed, believers have the love-nature of God in them. And the manifestations of practical love among the brethren will naturally result in unity. This is because as new creatures in Christ, they have the implanted spiritual capacity to demonstrate love. Without this spiritual experience, life will be barren, expression of love will be carnal and unity will be superficial. The reason is that love endears; it attracts others.

God’s love is the expected standard of the believer’s love for fellow brethren. His love is unconditional (1 John 4:8-16). It is sacrificial, eternal and enduring (Ephesians 3:19; John 3:16; Jeremiah 31:3; Hosea 14:4; John 13:1). Christ stirred up the hearts of believers to practically get into the life of loving one another selflessly, unconditionally and wholeheartedly. The kind of love our Lord enjoins is not a product of the old nature which manifests itself in suspicion, malice and envy, but a disposition which reveals itself in goodwill, confidence and mutual helpfulness. We are to love one another the way Christ loves us. He loves us with a constant, consistent and forbearing love. He sacrificed Himself in love. At the cross He displayed the meaning of true love; He is love in bold prints, plainly written upon the pages of history and readable by all men in all ages. As He loves us, so He expects us to love one another. He says, “**As I have loved you that ye also have love one to another**” (John 13:34).

The practical life of love among brethren gives rise to unity. Having endowed us with this spiritual capacity, we are to obey His command and “**love one another with a pure heart fervently**”. This requires that every believer and member of the church carry out his responsibilities of love towards other brethren who are sick, lonely, jobless, poor, etc. It is unfortunate that many avoid or refuse to carry out their responsibilities of love towards other brethren in the home and in local assemblies where they worship. Yet, they complain that there is no unity in the church. They have forgotten that love is interactive: as they expect others to love, so should they themselves! A church that understands true and scriptural definition of love and practices the same in the fear of God will experience biblical unity.

Love is essentially a manifestation of the multi-dimensional fruit of the Spirit. And where the believer loses his first love for God, his love for the brethren will also be flagging as it is difficult to love the brethren without a blossoming and fervent love for

God. The case of Peter going to fish after Christ's death, and Christ's probing question on his love for Him illustrates this point. Peter, for instance, left feeding of the lambs and sheep of God – his responsibility of love for God towards others - in search of the mundane. He could not keep the lambs and sheep of God together. But Christ restored him; and everyone who has abandoned his service of love that enhances the unity of the church needs to pray for restoration today.

Question 2: *Why is love essential in the Church?*

Love is vital amongst brethren in the church because it is the true proof of Christian discipleship. According to Christ, love is one of the virtues that convince the world that we belong to Him. Unbelievers understand little or no doctrine, creed or meetings of the church. The life of love, sacrificial giving, unconditional care and shared concern among brethren is all they care to see. **“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another”** (John 13:35). Love is the acid-test of a genuine salvation experience. The love that prevails in our Home Caring Fellowship has, often times, made observers proclaim, “These are Christians indeed, for they love one another.” Love makes for fruitful service for there is no obedience without love and no service without obedience. Thus, Christ warns: **“If ye love me, keep my commandments ... If a man love me, he will keep my words ... he that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings”** (John 14:15,22,23). The real test of love is obedience to Christ, submission to His will and a readiness to spend and be spent in His service.

THE SCOPE OF SCRIPTURAL UNITY (Psalm 33:1-3; Romans 12:16; 15:5,6; 1 Corinthians 1:10; Philippians 1:27; 2:2; 3:16; 1 Peter 3:8; Matthew 18:19; Luke 10:1,17)

The Bible did not leave us in dark concerning areas of scriptural unity. Since Christ's death has removed all cause of separation, the divine imperative is for believers to be one. Therefore, those who maintain racial, tribal and ethnic divides in the church are not doing the will of God. They have, by their actions, rejected the purpose of Christ's sacrifice on the Cross where **“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).

God expects believers to be one in fellowship, caring, worship, doctrine, worship, prayer, evangelism, etc. The church that is thus united is always a threat to the kingdom of darkness. The forces of darkness to which believers are constantly engaged in battle are, according to the scripture, organized in a united hierarchical order. And they work through their human agents on earth against the Church (Ephesians 6:10-17). Though Satan imitates the triune God, the diligence with which forces of darkness do evil throws a challenge to the believer who sees no reason in cooperating with God in fulfilling the great commission. Inspired by Satan, some sons of belial bound themselves together with an oath not to taste anything until they have killed Paul. Co-operating to do evil and hinder God's work and word is outside the will of God. Believers should out-perform these sadists through unity in carrying out divine imperative to save men from sin and eternal destruction.

We need to have the mind of Christ so as to be united in doing His will. The building of the Tower of Babel became an abandoned project because it was contrary to the plan of God for man. Many people still become spiritually bankrupt because they are united outside the will of God.

THE NATURE AND PRAYER FOR BELIEVERS' ONENESS (Matthew 28:19; John 10:30; 17:21-23; Ephesians 2:14-18; 4:3,4,13; 1 Corinthians 10:17; 12:12-26; John 10:16)

Question 3: *What is the standard of believers unity?*

The unity in the Godhead remains the perfect picture of oneness that is expected of believers. Christ, on several occasions, referred to the Father as working through Him. Besides, He declares that He and the Father are one. He reveals in His prayer for sanctification and unity of the church that **“That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.”**

The apostle Paul, in his epistles, used the members of the body to illustrate the kind of unity that God expects of believers. He says, **“we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another”** (1 Corinthians 10:17; 12:20,27; Ephesians 1:23; 4:25). The implication of this is that anyone who hurts a member is doing so to all the members of the body of Christ as evident in His revelation to Saul on the way to Damascus. As united, we share a common joy, pain, goal, aspirations, etc.

Question 4: *Give reasons why unity is necessary in the church.*

The believer needs to seek to obey God’s command to be united with other brethren. A song-writer highlights the common spiritual experience of all believers in his piece:

“Elect from every nation,
Yet one o’er all the earth,
Her charter of salvation
One Lord, one faith, one birth
One holy name she blesses,
Partakes one holy food,
And to one hope she presses,
With every grace endued.”

Since there is one God, one faith, one baptism, there is no room for disunity in the church and family of God. Any wonder then that Christ prayed for the unity of the church! He knows that the Church that enjoys unity in aim and spirit is animated by the same desire to promote the glory of Christ.

Unity is indispensable in the church of God today. The Bible says two are better than one: if one falls, the other will lift him up. In the battle against the Amalekites, Aaron and Hur supported and held Moses’ hand up to ensure Joshua’s victory, a picture of what co-operation and intercessory prayers offered on behalf of missionaries on the battlefield for the Lord can do in the church today. So, we need to be united to win victory in life’s battles, advance and initiate positive changes for the good of the kingdom and edification of the body of Christ (Exodus 17:12; Judges 20:11; 1 Samuel 14:6,7; 2 Kings 6:1-3; Ezra 10:4; 1 Chronicles 12:38).

MAINTAINING LOVE AND UNITY IN THE CHURCH (1 John 4:7-12, 16-21; Psalm 133:1-3; 1 Corinthians 1:13; Galatians 2:9; 1 Corinthians 1:10; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Ephesians 4:3; Philippians 1:27; 4:2; Colossians 2:2; 1 Peter 3:8; Nehemiah 4:1-23)

Question 5: *How can you, as a believer, maintain love and unity in the church?*

Unity is not an idle dream: individual members of the church have a part to play if the church is to remain united. **“Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”** (Ephesians 4:3). Apart from current and genuine experiences of salvation, sanctification and Holy Spirit baptism, the believer needs to pray for the rich experience and manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit if there is to be practical love and

unity in the church. We need special grace to live the life that brings about love and unity by constantly triumphing over the sinful nature. Quarrels and disagreements can be settled among the brethren easily where all seek to live the selfless, Christ-like life. We must bear the inadequacies of one another as we seek to perfect the body of Christ. We must instruct in righteousness and rebuke/correct those who sow seeds of discord through gossip, jealousy, malice and other carnal behaviours in the church. It is important also for individual members of the church to practice restitution towards those that have been offended or hurt by their words or actions inadvertently. Leaders should be prompt in handling genuine grievances and complains of neglect among the brethren like the early church (Acts 6:1-7).

Unity and love are so essential in the Church that no surrender of our own preferences can be too great to secure it. For nothing should we pray for more earnestly than Jesus' prayer that **"they all may be one."** We must all work at diffusing and permeating the church with a peaceful spirit by promoting and provoking love and unity which is the unvarying condition of all real success. The fulfilment of the function and force of the Church also requires unity. Therefore, each believing Christian must esteem the other better than himself. Unity calls for mutual esteem and affection. This can only be attained by a disposition that seeks to identify and place high premium on the good qualities in others.

Unity, like an exquisite fragrance, attracts people. Unity in the Church is a constant invitation, though voiceless, yet influential and effective. Through unity in the Church, many souls will be won and backsliders restored to the faith. It is as we are so united in love, fulfilling the divine purpose that God's blessings will be immeasurably showered upon us. The scripture testifies that where love and unity existed among brethren, **"there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore"**. Victory over adversaries and progress in the service of God, such as Nehemiah and the Israelites had while doing His work, will be a mirage without love and unity in the church. God's anointing flows and His presence abides unceasingly with believers who are united in Christ. **"Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you"** (2 Corinthians 13:11). Christ has prayed and died to make us one; we also need to pray and continue to make sacrifices of love to maintain unity in the body of Christ to the glory of God.

Lesson 403

DAILY CHRISTIAN SERVICE

MEMORY VERSE: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (**Romans 12:1**).

TEXT: Romans 12:1-21

Christian service is a natural consequence of our being born again. The fact that we are left here after we had given our lives to Christ until we are called home to glory implies that serving the Lord is a direct result of our salvation. Consecration, submission and service are significant hallmarks of serious Christian calling. Submission entails complete yieldedness to God and church leadership. A consecrated and submissive life finds expression in a daily life of committed Christian service.

We need to remind ourselves of the peculiarity of the age we live in as we consider this topic. This is an age when hoards of people are obsessed and taken up in their own selfish inordinate ambition. People are engrossed in a quest that zeros in on self-attainment, education, prosperity, power, popularity, prominence and pride. People, including so-called believers are much more interested in making money nowadays than serving the Lord. They would rather give the best of their time to acquiring mundane physical things than render services to others that have eternal value.

In the face of all these, it therefore becomes essential to examine the only selfless cause which transcends life here and is significant enough to enjoy heaven’s attention and reward on the last day.

Question 1: *Why is the subject of daily Christian service important?*

THE PATTERN OF CHRISTIAN SERVICE (Romans 12:1-8; Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 14:23; 19:10).

The striking peculiarity of Christian service in today’s modern world is its variegated pattern. Our daily life of service as Christians covers divers areas. But broad as it may seem, it can be neatly summed up into four unmistakable areas of service: one, service to God (verses 1,2); two, service to ourselves (3-8); three, service to the brethren or the body of Christ (verses 9-16) and four, service to the world (verses 17-21).

Question 2: *Mention the four broad areas in which we may categorize Christian service.*

In all its varied shapes and forms, the most compelling of our daily service is the preaching of the gospel, otherwise known as evangelism. And, evangelism, simply put, is the deliberate, purposeful and prayerful effort of sharing the gospel with another with the intent of winning him or her for the Lord. When we evangelize or witness, we are serving God by helping others make the most important decision of

their lives. We are helping them to come out of darkness into light and escape eternal damnation in hell. Through this effort, the soulwinner is helping the sinner get on the path to spending eternity with God in heaven. A former communist who gave a fanatic devotion to communism, George North, later found Christ and in his new zeal underscored the significance of regular witnessing: "Picture your town, if every believer gave out gospel tracts every evening, if every weekend they held large open air meetings or indoor rallies; told their workmates everyday about Jesus; gave every spare coin to His cause, and invested every spare minute in prayer if you cannot preach, give. If you cannot give, distribute tracts. If you cannot distribute tracts, talk to your friends" This is the picturesque expression of our daily life of evangelism.

Jesus said in the following references: "**Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature**" (Mark 16:15). "**For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost**" (Luke 19:10). "**Go thou and preach the kingdom of God**" (Luke 9:60). "**Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled**" (Luke 14:23). Evangelism therefore is considered as every believer's daily service.

Question 3: *Mention some forms of service we can daily engage in as Christians.*

Involvement in the laity work of the church is another form of Christian service in which we can daily exercise ourselves. The church has many areas of work in which we can get involved and utilize our God-given gifts. The wise Creator has bestowed on us different abilities, gifts and talents which the apostle Paul refers to as "**gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us.**" Some have the gift of caring, love and leadership. They love to visit and share their material and spiritual blessings with other people. Some can serve as house caring fellowship leaders, zonal leaders and district coordinators. Some have the gift of praying: they can be involved in the prayer warriors team of the church. Some Christians are mature and seasoned by reason of their development and exposure: they may be chosen to be missionaries or ministers. Some others can be chosen to sing or play stringed instruments. Some are blessed with natural strong physique and may make good ushers. Some have spare time and they could spend it in the church seeing to the cleanliness of the environment. Some have given themselves to the serious study of God's word and acquisition of wisdom and they make good counsellors and Bible teachers.

Still others have been blessed of God with material things – money, mansions, means and connections – so that they can support church projects, Christian workers and the needy. "**Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality**".

Paul wrote about this multifaceted pattern of Christian service and gifts thus: "**Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness**" (Romans 12:6-8).

THE PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIAN SERVANTS (Romans 12:9-21; Zechariah 3:7; 2 Timothy 2:21; Titus 2:12).

The principle or attitude of Christian servants are worthy of serious consideration. There are conditions we must meet before we can serve. The conditions are as applicable under the New Testament as they were under the Old. God, in the Old Testament, said to Zechariah **“Thus saith the Lord of hosts; If thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge, then thou shalt also judge my house, and shalt also keep my courts, and I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by”** (Zechariah 3:7). The word **“if”** shows the conditional nature of Christian service. It is therefore a grave distortion of truth to assume that there are no moral or spiritual conditions for Christian servants.

Question 4: What is the first and most important condition Christian servants must fulfil?

The first condition is that we must **“be first partakers of the fruit”** (2 Timothy 2:6). We cannot invite a friend to follow the Saviour we have not fully followed. A Christian who professes and possesses a solid relationship with the Lord must follow Him, do the things He says and walk as He walked.

Secondly, servants of the Lord must live holy, unblameable lives. **“If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work”** (2 Timothy 2:21). God’s perfect plan is that **“we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness all the days of our life”** (Luke 1:74,75). This implies that self must be dead for our service to be acceptable and profitable. There must be a holy and sincere courtesy which pushes self back and prefers others.

Third, we should serve with the attitude of sobriety. A sober disposition cancels the air of self-importance or self-conceitedness. Sobriety discourages an overly good opinion of oneself. Paul, in our text, puts it this way: **“For I say through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith”**; **“We should live soberly, righteously, an godly, in this present world”** (Romans 12:3; Titus 2:12).

Fourth, our daily Christian service must be carried out with fervour and zeal. A lukewarm, half-hearted service is as good as idling. Neither a lackadaisical, grudging disposition nor a lazy attitude in the matters of divine service is encouraged for it is unprofitable. We must at all times remember that this is the Lord’s service and it requires our utmost best. Paul says, **“Not slothful in business; fervent in Spirit; serving the Lord”** (Romans 12:11).

Fifth, our daily Christian service must be backed with the principle of love. Love is the motivating factor that is essential and needful for service. Love is the greatest constraining power in the world. Christ came down into the world out of love for lost humanity. **“Greater love hath no man than these, that a man lay down his life for his friends”** (John 15:13). **“God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us”** (Romans 5:8). We must love God, the church and sinners before we can serve them. **“Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good”** (Romans 12:9).

Sixth, we must saturate our service with supplication. Prayer directs and puts profit on our service. Jesus’ service to the world was backed with constant prayer, supplication and communion with God. Our little effort becomes much when it is bathed in prayer. We must be **“continuing instant in prayer”** for effectiveness in whatever area we find ourselves serving.

Finally, our service must be done in the power of the Spirit of God. The secret of unceasing, continual successful service is rendering service in His power and abiding in Him. **“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye except ye abide in me”** (John 15:4). Much can be done when the Spirit of God has His full control of our lives. Jesus knew this and said: **“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).

Question 5: *What principles should be upheld by Christian servants?*

THE PROMISES TO CHRISTIAN SERVANTS (1 Corinthians 3:11-15; Exodus 23:25; Mark 9:41; Luke 6:35; 1 Corinthians 15:58).

The promises to Christian servants are rich and noble. Some of these promises are temporal and others transcend the present into eternity.

Question 6: *What are the promises for Christian servants?*

There is a promise of reward for servants who do enduring work for the Lord. **“If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward”** (1 Corinthians 3:14). **“And ye shall serve the Lord your God, and he shall bless thy bread, and thy water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee”** (Exodus 23:25). **“And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel’s, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life”** (Mark 10:29,30).

Second, servants of the Lord have the promise of eternal abode with the Master, Jesus Christ. **“If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour”** (John 12:26). Christ is on the right hand of the Father now, there we shall be with Him if we serve Him faithfully till the end. This implies that we shall share in the joy, bliss and glory of heaven. If we follow him to the end, we shall be with Him in the end. Third, servants of God shall be honoured by God. God’s honour is not like earth’s human honour. It is the true, lasting and highest honour that anyone could have. Though a measure of the honour is received here but the greatest and highest would come when we get to heaven. An unquantifiable measure of glory and honour will be heaped on God’s servants in heaven. **“But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him”** (1 Corinthians 2:9).

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING

EVENING

MON	Luke	8	2 Samuel	14	
TUE	"	9	"		15
WED	"	10	"	16-17	
THUR	"	11	"		18
FRI	"	12	"	19	
SAT	"	13	"	20-21	
SUN	"	14	"	22	