

STUDY 1
WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?
Acts 5:3-4

Many are confused about the Holy Spirit. Others believe they know but have various misconceptions about the Holy Spirit. Some believe He is the wind or power or a force. Most often the Holy Spirit is thought of as an impersonal power that God makes available to the followers of Christ.

We go to the Bible to find the accurate identity of who the Holy Spirit is. We cannot walk with someone that we do not know. So deeper walk with the Holy Spirit must begin at the point of knowing who the Holy Spirit is.

The Bible declares that the Holy Spirit is God; a person with mind, emotions and a will. Peter confronts Ananias on why he lied to the Holy Spirit and clearly tells him that he had “not lied to men but to God.” Holy Spirit possesses all the characteristics of God, omnipresence, omniscient and omnipotent. The Holy Spirit is God, the third person of the trinity. He is the God and person that Jesus Christ the Son promised to send to us. The Holy Spirit was promised by the Father and has been sent to us. He requires the same obedience, worship and confidence we repose in the Son and the Father. And He chooses to dwell *in* us.

DISCUSSIONS

1. Find out the characteristics of the Holy Spirit from the following passages: Psalm 139: 7-8; 1Corinthians 2: 10-11; Luke 1: 35; Acts 10: 38.
2. How do these passages speak of the trinity, can you see the Holy Spirit in these passages? Genesis 1: 26; Matthew 3: 16-17; Matthew 28: 19-20; 2Corinthians 13: 14.
3. What are the actions or emotions exhibited by the Holy Spirit in the following passages: Exodus 35: 21; Isaiah 57: 15; 63: 10; Luke 13: 11; 2: 25-26; 12: 12?

STUDY 2
WHY DO WE NEED THE HOLY SPIRIT?
Acts 1: 4-9

The cross is the gateway to salvation but the experience of the Holy Spirit is the gateway to a powerful Christian life. In fact it is impossible to live a Christian life without initial and ongoing experience with the Holy Spirit. Until one has an experience with the Holy Spirit, true Christian journey has not begun. Interesting God contrasts being filled with the Holy Spirit with being drunk. Somebody who is drunk with alcohol is controlled by the alcohol. But to be drunk with the Holy Spirit is to be controlled and consumed by the Spirit, *Ephesians 5: 18*. It is a shame that many Christian are not aware nor interested in the person and walk with the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised that He would send *another* Comforter, Holy Spirit is that Comforter. He is also known as our Helper, Teacher and Guide. He receives from Jesus and passes that on to us – revelation! He prays for us. The Holy Spirit exalts Jesus. He convicts us. He regenerates us. He lives in us, seals us! In biblical times a seal was a guarantee, indicate ownership or protect against tampering. The seal of the Holy Spirit takes place at the point of salvation. It is a promise or guarantee of the believer’s future, eternal inheritance with Jesus, *Ephesians 1: 13-14*.

DISCUSSIONS

1. Discuss the roles of the Holy Spirit in our lives from the following passages: John 14: 15-27; 16: 5-15; Romans 8: 1-17; Galatians 5: 16-26; 1Corinthians 12.
2. How can you tell if you are being led by the Holy Spirit? Is the voice of our conscience the same as the voice of the Holy Spirit? Galatians 5: 16-25.
3. Where does the Holy Spirit reside? Romans 8:9; 1Corinthians 6: 19-20; 12: 13.
4. From the ensuing passages discuss the “seal of the Holy Spirit,” Romans 8:16; Romans 8: 9-10; 1Corinthians 6: 19-20; Romans 8: 13

STUDY 3
NO MORE EXCUSES FOR SHORTFALLS
Matthew 5:48

“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” This command comes as the conclusion of the preceding verses. Our God is a loving, kind, good and benevolent One. Being His children we should be as loving and kind, giving and helpful as our heavenly Father. God’s children are to resemble their Father. *“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”*

In fact, this is the conclusion of the whole chapter. Be ye therefore righteous, merciful, pure in heart, peace-loving, truthful and loving as children of God. This is the goal of the rest of the Sermon on the Mount; *“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”* *“Thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are;”* *“be not ye therefore like unto them”* (Matthew 6:5, 8).

You must be as your Father in heaven (Matthew 18:33; John 17:22; Luke 6:35,36; Ephesians 4:32; 5:25; Colossians 3:13; 1 John 2:6; 3:3,7). In reality, it can be said that Matthew 5:48 is the purpose of creation, of redemption and even of divine revelation. This is the reason for Christ’s sacrifice and atonement. It is the goal of Christ’s mission on earth and the purpose of Christian ministry: to *“present every man perfect in Christ Jesus”* (Colossians 1:28). *“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”*

DIVINE INTENTION ON HOW TO REACH PERFECTION **Matthew 5:48**
Matthew 5:48; Genesis 17:1; Leviticus 20:26; Deuteronomy 18:13,14; Job 1:1,8; 2:3; Luke 6:40; Luke 1:73-75; Psalm 37:37.

God used the word *“perfect”*, when He called on Abram, His friend to be perfect. Christ, our Lord and Saviour also commanded His followers to be perfect. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament command us to be holy and perfect (1 Chronicles 28:9; 2 Corinthians 13:11; 1 Peter 1:15-17). The Apostle Paul speaks of those who are *“perfect”* (Philippians 3:15-17).

“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” God, Himself, our Creator and Redeemer, is the only pattern of the perfection which He demands of His children. The words are emphatic: we are to be like God whose nature is **love** and whose acts are acts of mercy, kindness and goodness. These words of Christ include both a command and a promise. What He commands, He also provides means to accomplish and fulfil.

As in God's infinite nature there is no sin, nothing but goodness and love, so in our finite nature there shall dwell no sin, for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus shall make us free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2). When God, by His Spirit, lives in, fills and rules our hearts, totally influencing and controlling our hearts, thoughts and actions, neither Satan nor sin can have any part therein. God's power is able to do all things in us and for us.

DIVINE ASSURANCE AND RESOURCE FOR PERFECTION Matthew 5:48
Matthew 5:48; Ezekiel 36:25-27; Jeremiah 31:33,34; Hebrews 10:10-14; John 17:17-23; Ephesians 5:25-27; Titus 2:14; Hebrews 13:20,21.

The call to perfection is a call to holiness. It is a call to separation *from* all sinfulness and separation *for* God simultaneously. This call saturates many pages of the Scriptures. The reason for it is in the nature of God. Holiness or Christian perfection is not optional, it is imperative. Because it is imperative, it must be possible. He who wills the end must provide the means. If Christian perfection is His will and command, He must have made it possible for us to attain; otherwise He would call us to an unequal and unfair task.

Truly this call and demand is beyond our natural ability. We cannot attain unto holiness or Christian perfection in our own self-will or self-effort. God provides and gives the resource for this ongoing-experience. We obtain and keep the experience by grace through faith, not of merit by works. God's holiness and perfect love is the pattern and standard of His demand. God's promises are as great and broad as His commandments. He has not commanded more than He has promised. His mighty power is always made available to fulfil His promise. With faith in God who is always faithful we are sure of divine support and enablement to be as holy and perfect as He desires us to be.

OUR RESPONSIBILITY IN ATTAINING CHRISTIAN PERFECTION
Matthew 5:48

Matthew 5:48; Hebrews 6:1; Psalm 101:2-7; Romans 12:1,2; 2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:22-24; James 1:6-8; 1 John 5:14,15; Philippians 3:14-17; 2 Peter 3:11-14.

God's command and promise must stir up desire and passion in any true child of God. Looking at the great demand and knowing that we are helpless in ourselves to fulfil God's will of holiness and Christian perfection, we seek His face in prayer and supplication. In our pursuit and prayer we consecrate ourselves to God and commit

ourselves to seeking His glory in all things and at all times. Our consecration includes denying and dethroning self, willingness to do and be whatever and wherever He wants us to do and to be. Our sincere pursuit of holiness and Christian perfection will make us to constantly reject and give up whatever hinders or decreases holiness and Christian perfection however pleasing to the flesh or appealing to human nature. Our prayer should be from the heart, praying with faith and fervency, as Jacob or Jonah, knowing we are praying for the greatest need on earth and for eternity. God always answers the prayer of faith. What we receive through consecration and prayer we can only keep and grow in through consecration and prayer.

DISCUSSIONS

1. In the light of *1 John 2: 6* explain the divine requirement to be perfect.
2. What is this Christian perfection? *Philippians 3: 14-17; Titus 2:14; Hebrews 13:20-21.*
3. Why is Christian perfection essential? *1Chronicles 28:9; 2Corinthians 13:11; 1Peter 1:15-19*

STUDY 4
DANGERS OF SELF-DECEPTION
Matthew 7:21-23

The concluding verses of Matthew chapter 7 are heart-piercing calling for an honest and thorough heart-searching on the part of preachers and hearers. It is not a surprise to know that those who refuse Christ as Lord would not inherit the Kingdom of God. Learning that it is possible to zealously call Christ Lord, Lord and still spend eternity outside the Kingdom of heaven, is the shocking revelation that makes hearts tremble. To hear that idle, ignorant, cold, unproductive preachers will miss eternal fellowship with the King of glory would have been an expected conclusion but who would have thought that courageous proclaimers of the mighty, powerful, all-conquering Name and Gospel of Christ may still spend eternity in outer darkness, in the region of the lost and the damned? That is the heart-troubling revelation from the lips of the Son of God.

The day of reckoning and judgment will reveal some strange things in the full view of the whole world. On that day when the rottenness of religion will be revealed before the whole world, when the hidden evil of prophets will be made known, when the corrupt hearts of demon-chasers will be exposed, when the iniquity underneath “*many wonderful works*” will be brought to the surface, on that day, there will be anguish of souls that will never end. Not all that profess and call themselves Christians shall get to heaven. Not all that preach and call themselves ministers will inherit the Kingdom of God. Not all that prophesy and cast out devils will escape the final condemnation. Not all miracle-workers will hear “*well done, good and faithful servant,*” on the last day. Many will hear: “*I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity.*” These are sobering truths, “*think on these things.*”

**THE EMPTY PROFESSION OF SUBTLE, SUBVERSIVE MIRACLE-
WORKERS**

Matthew 7:21,22; 1 Samuel 18:10-12; 1 Kings 13:11-24; 1 Kings 22:11,12,23; Numbers 22:22-31; Judges 7:9-15; Ecclesiastes 2:1-3,9-11; Mark 13:21-23; John 11:49-52; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15.

There must be conversion and consistent obedience to God’s Word in order to enter the Kingdom of heaven. If there is no fruit of the Spirit, our prophetic gifts and our spiritual gifts of power will plead in vain to allow entrance into God’s Kingdom. Men and women of power who are destitute of purity shall be shut out of God’s Kingdom. Gifts without godliness; power without purity; commitment without conversion; faith without faithfulness; prophesying without purity; casting out devils

without casting out evil from one's heart; wonderful works without willingness to walk in obedience - all would be of no avail on the final day.

No one can be a citizen of the Kingdom who does not obey the King. The King of kings receives no one in His Kingdom whose religion lies only in words and ceremonies. Only those whose lives display the obedience of true discipleship. To think of the plight of nominal Christians and unsaved ministers on the last day is frightening. Multitudes of so-called Christians shall be disowned by Christ on that great day.

Many who currently prophesy in His Name shall then perish with those who pollute the Name of God. Many who have cast out devils now, shall be cast out to devils then. And many who have done seemingly wonderful works shall then be damned with evil workers. A bare profession of Christianity without the performance of God's will, is a very insufficient ground to build our hope of eternal fellowship with God in heaven. Ministry outside His will is wasteful!

THE EXTRAORDINARY POWER OF SOME SINFUL MIRACLE- WORKERS Matthew 7:22

Matthew 7:22; Numbers 24:2-9,15-19; Deuteronomy 23:5; Numbers 31:8,16; 2 Peter 2:15,16; Revelation 2:14; Judges 16:1-14; 1 Samuel 19:18-24; 1 Corinthians 13:1-3.

These last days we are witnessing great miracles. There is a great revival of religion. Many kinds of religion are demonstrating dazzling manifestations of super-human miracles and wonders. Some will come in the Name of Christ while others will claim to be Christ. The miracles will be so convincing, compelling and confusing that many will be deceived, enticed, and drawn into error, and damnation (Matthew 24:4,5,23-25;

Mark 13:22; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12). ***“Many will say unto ME IN THAT DAY.”*** A day is coming when all workers of ministry will be tested to see their worth and the motive behind activities. ***“The day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is”*** (1 Corinthians 3:13).

Many self-confident, self-deceived people will be disappointed. ***“Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied..., cast out devils..., done many wonderful works?”*** They had boldly proclaimed Christ in public ministry and confirmed their messages with

miracles. They thought they had rendered the highest services to the cause of Christ and in the Name of Christ. All the preaching in the world will not save the preacher if he does not practise what he preaches. The preaching of excellent sermons, the understanding of great mysteries, even the working of wonderful miracles, is no proof that a man has saving faith. Receiving or performing miracles is no substitute for doing God's will from the heart. The one thing needful is faithful obedience to God. Those who are successful in doing many wonderful works and omit one thing that is needful will be lost and damned for ever.

THE ETERNAL PERDITION OF SHORT-SIGHTED MIRACLE-WORKERS Matthew 7:23

Matthew 7:23; 25:12,41; Psalm 5:4,5; Luke 13:25-28 Matthew 13:40-42; 2 Peter 2:14-17; Matthew 13:49-51; 1 Peter 4:17,18; Revelation 19:20; 20:10-15.

“And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you.” With all their profession, with all their claim of intimacy with Christ, with all their show of zeal and affectation, with all their prophesying and preaching, with all their casting out devils and doing many wonderful works, they had never been true followers of Christ! How far can a man go in the Christian religion and yet not be born again? How ‘successful’ can a man be in ministry and yet not be a true child of God? These things call for more than self-examination; they call for Spirit-examination. ***“Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting”*** (Psalm 139:2,24).

“I never knew you.” They held the truth in unrighteousness while preaching the truth of righteousness. Alas! How many preachers are there whose pulpit ministries are admired by their congregations, when they are nothing, worse than nothing, before God. What an awful situation, that a man of eminent gifts whose talents are a source of great usefulness, should be only as a sign-post in the way to heaven, pointing out the way to others, without walking in it himself. They claimed intimacy with Christ but He disowns them before God and the holy angels. ***“Depart from Me, ye that work iniquity.”*** What a terrible word! What a dreadful separation! Those words seal the eternal doom and misery of the unsaved in hell for ever.

DISCUSSIONS

1. So what is the missing link?
2. Is the link missing in you?

STUDY 5
HAVE YOU BEEN TO JESUS? *Revelation 3:1, 17-22*

We step in deeper into our previous study with the question, “Have you been to Jesus?” Answer to this questions will help provide the key to the missing link identified in our previous study. Christendom today is filled with people who say “**Lord, Lord**” but who do not obey the Word of God. They profess much with their mouths but do not possess grace in their hearts. They talk of the Lord but they do not walk with the Lord. The most impressive talk about the Lord counts for nothing where genuine conversion is absent. Even the most religious worship is worthless before God if sincere obedience to God’s Word is lacking. If our heads are enlightened about the Lord as Redeemer but our hearts have not **experienced** His redemption what will our knowledge avail us? If our hearts are empty of God’s grace and if our lives are devoid of godliness we shall be weighed in the balances of heaven and found wanting. For our Christian testimony to be acceptable to God, for our profession to receive heaven’s approval, we must be born again, our hearts must be renewed, our will must be surrendered to God, our character must be transformed, our obedience to God’s Word must be from the heart. Personally and practically, we must be DOERS of God’s will before we are qualified to enter God’s eternal Kingdom

THE INSINCERITY OF SENTIMENTAL DISCIPLES DEVOID OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Matthew 7:21; John 2:23-25; 6:14,15,24-27,60-66; John 12:42,43; Mark 6:20-27; Acts 8:13,21-23; Psalm 78:35-37; Matthew 18:3; John 3:3,5; James 1:22-27.

During the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ, many superficial, sentimental followers called Him “Lord” but their hearts did not cleave unto Him. They were not wholeheartedly committed to Him and He could not commit Himself to them.

“A certain man said unto Him, Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest.” “And another also said, Lord, I will follow Thee; but...” (Luke 9:57,61).

Like many others, their hearts did not agree with their mouths; their will did not support their words. Lip profession or verbal acknowledgement of the truth concerning Christ will not open the way to eternal enjoyment of Christ’s Kingdom except we have experienced true repentance and sound conversion.

All outward profession will be found useless and soul-damning on the final day of reckoning if it is not accompanied with a gracious character in doing the will of the Father. No matter how loudly we profess to accept Christ and His teaching, unless we are wholeheartedly committed to ***“doing the will of God from the heart”***

(Ephesians 6:6), we shall be shockingly disappointed on that day. Obedience to God's Word is what marks us out as God's children.

THE INDISPENSABILITY OF STEADFAST DEDICATION TO RIGHTEOUSNESS

Matthew 7:21; 12:49,50; Philippians 2:12-16; 3:6-9; Hebrews 12:11-14; 2 Peter 1:5-11; 1 John 3:1-10; 2 Peter 3:10-14.

“Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21). We all want to get to heaven after our life on earth. Are we making any preparation to see our desire or hope fulfilled? Some hope to enter the Kingdom of heaven on the basis of water baptism without repentance, or regular church attendance without being born again or self-righteousness and good works without ***“the righteousness which is of God by faith”*** or involvement in ministry without freedom from sin and iniquity. Such people are building their hope on the sand.

The religion of head knowledge without heart transformation is not sufficient to take anyone to heaven. Associating with God's people, being called 'brother' or 'sister' by church members, is not enough. That will profit us nothing on the Day of Judgment when the secrets of men will be brought to the open. ***“There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness”*** (Proverbs 30:12). The will of God is that we should forsake all our sins, trust in Christ to forgive and cleanse us from all unrighteousness and follow Him in unwavering obedience all the days of our lives. Then and only then, can we hope to enter into the Kingdom of heaven.

DISCUSSIONS

1. How can you be assured that you are not running the Christian race in vain, Philippians 2: 12-16?
2. What was your experience when you came to Jesus? How is your experience with Him now?

STUDY 6
THE WISDOM OF LIVING WITH ETERNITY IN VIEW
Matthew 7:24-29

In these concluding verses our Lord brings the greatest recorded sermon to an appropriate conclusion. The goal of His message is to make us “*wise unto salvation*” (2 Timothy 3:15). Indeed this is the goal of the whole of the scriptures and the goal of every message from the Word of God. Multitudes of people had heard this great message from Christ, the Saviour of the world. The Lord had revealed God’s requirement for the blessed life. It was a great privilege to hear the truth of the Kingdom from Christ Himself. But hearing the Word, even from Christ, the Lord of glory, is not enough. There must be a proper response to the message we have heard.

The Lord divides all who hear the truth of the Gospel to two classes. These two groups of people are classified as wise or foolish. The two groups have some similarities among them. They both hear the Word of God. They know the way of salvation as revealed by Christ. They build a house of spiritual life after hearing God’s Word. Both builders think that their houses will stand and withstand the tests and trials of life. The outward appearances of their spiritual houses look alike. These similarities are superficial. The differences actually determine the strength and quality of our spiritual lives. One house has its foundation on the Rock, the other, with no foundation is built on the sand. One group of hearers obey the Word of repentance and righteousness, the other group do nothing, and they do not obey the Word. The wise man receives grace to live in obedience to God’s Word; the foolish man merely hears the Word without living in obedience. The wise man will rejoice throughout eternity while the foolish man will suffer throughout eternity.

THE FOUNDATION OF LOVING OBEDIENCE TO CHRIST’S WORD
Matthew 7:24,25

Matthew 7:24,25; Luke 6:47,48; 2 Timothy 2:19-22; Colossians 3:16,17; 1 John 2:3-6; 1 Peter 4:12-19; 2 Timothy 3:12-14; 2 Corinthians 4:7-18; Romans 8:35-39; Revelation 3:10-13.

“*Whosoever hears these sayings of Mine and does them.*” Our wisdom begins with hearing the Word of God with a purposeful heart to obey. There is no wisdom in hearing and not doing. Hearing about repentance, believing and entering the Kingdom, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, being pure in heart, walking in the light and glorifying God in all we do - this is our wisdom.

The wise builder builds on a strong foundation that will withstand all storms of life. Christ is the foundation of the Christian life. Yet we need to remember that Christ Himself refers to the foundation here as ‘obedience to His Word’ (Luke 6:46-48). The foundation is also referred to as “*repentance and faith toward God*” (Hebrews 6:1), separation and departure from all iniquity (2 Timothy 2:19), trusting in the living God and doing good (1 Timothy 6:17-19), the fellowship and teaching of the Apostles and Prophets of the New Testament (Ephesians 2:19,20). Obedience to the Word of Christ and a gracious life of godliness is the unassailable foundation of the wise builder whose house will stand till eternity. True wisdom consists in building our spiritual house on the Rock, Jesus Christ, making the building firm and strong by having our motives, our tempers and lives conformed to His Word, leaning on nothing but His grace and enabling power.

THE FOOLISHNESS OF LIVING WITHOUT OBEDIENCE TO CHRIST’S WORD Matt 7:26-27

Matthew 7:26,27; Luke 6:49; Ezekiel 33:31,32; Proverbs 1:24-32; Romans 2:8-29; 1 John 3:10-15; Psalm 36:12; Jeremiah 25:4-7,27; 2 Chronicles 36:16; Hebrews 12:14-17.

“And everyone that heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened to a foolish man which built his house upon the sand.” More and more people are hearing the Word of God in our nation but how many are keeping, doing or obeying what they hear? He who reads or hears the Word of God but does not ask and receive grace from God to conform his life to that Word is like a fool whose foolishness will sting him throughout eternity. Knowing and learning of Christ’s righteousness, His sacrifice and atonement, while we do not pray to conform to His Word in our daily lives, is terrible self-deception. Let it be observed and seriously considered that it is not the man who hears or professes to believe these sayings of Christ, whose building shall stand, when the earth and all its works are burnt up, but the man who DOETH, that is, the man who consistently obeys them. Many people suppose that obedience to the Word of Christ is unnecessary as long as we believe on Him. The gospel of grace was brought to us by Christ to liberate us from sin and disobedience to lead us in the way of obedience to our heavenly Father. The house, or the Christian profession, that has no foundation of repentance, faith and righteousness will not stand the waves of trials and temptations on earth, neither will it stand the storm of judgment and wrath on the final day. Preaching and not living by the Word, hearing and not obeying the Word, worshipping and not walking in the truth, is dangerous and damning. Stop and consider. It is not too late to establish the foundation of repentance, to receive grace for godliness in order to continue living in righteousness for God’s glory.

THE FAILURE OF LISTENERS WHO OBSERVED CHRIST'S WISDOM Matthew 7:28,29

Matthew 7:28,29; Mark 1:21,22; Matthew 13:54-57; Matthew 22:22,33; Luke 4:22-29,32; 11:27,28; Acts 13:40,41; John 7:45,46; 4:39-42; James 1:18-25.

The people were astonished at His doctrine: for “***He taught them as One having authority.***” He had shown them the way into the Kingdom of God, He had revealed the depth of the meaning and application of the law of God, He had pierced their consciences with the sharp sword of the Spirit. He had turned on the light, searching the secrets of their hearts and exposing the shallowness of their religious practices. His teaching had awakened them and brought them to the point of decision, whether they would walk in the narrow way or persist in the broad way. They had heard what they had never heard from their religious leaders. They felt the authority and power in His Word; His explanations were persuasive, His statements were piercing, His illustrations were practical and pertinent, His conclusion was arresting and thought-provoking. His conduct commanded respect and attention, His whole approach was compelling and it demanded their decision. There was no frivolous allusion, no traditional inference, no quotation from uninspired writers, no fables from heathen philosophers; the whole sermon was pure, profound and powerful. It was amazingly simple in its presentation, yet so astonishingly sublime in its precepts.

He spoke with the authority of a King. He taught as One inspired from above, as a Teacher sent from God. “***The people were astonished.***” It was a great comment that they were astonished but a grave crime that they were astonished and nothing more. Did they all immediately repent? Did they mourn for their sins? Did spiritual hunger drive them to seek righteousness by faith? Did they become pure in heart so as to see God on the final day? Astonished! May our astonishment lead us to go through the strait gate, lead us to walk with Christ on the narrow way and keep us faithful and loyal to Christ until we live in the wonders of heaven together throughout eternity.

DISCUSSIONS

1. What is wisdom? Are you required to be wise? *Matthew 7: 24*
2. Can one person or two share their experiences of projects they embarked on and later found that them to be unwise? What did you do when you discovered this lack of wisdom?

STUDY 7
THE TONGUE OF A GODLY PERSON
James 3:1-10

The tongue is a very little part of the body, but very important and powerful. Without the tongue there is no natural life and the wrong use of it brings spiritual death. The tongue is the fleshly organ inside the mouth used in tasting, speaking and swallowing. Today we are focusing on the use of the tongue in speaking. Speaking, since life began, has been a major means of communication. Words spoken by individuals have many times brought peace, joy and hope to friends, homes and communities. At others times, words have brought wars, divorce and other calamities! **“Death and life are in the power of the tongue and they that love it shall reap the fruit thereof”** (Proverbs 18:21). It is therefore important to watch what we say, that we don’t eat the fruit of corruption and death.

CORRUPTIVE USE OF THE UNGODLY TONGUE

James 3:5-10; Matthew 12:31-37; Mark 7:21-23; Romans 1:29-32; Romans 3:13-14.

There is a lot of corruption in the tongue of an ungodly person. There is a direct mental link between the heart (mind) and the tongue. **“Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh”** (Matthew 12:34). Thus, if the heart is corrupt, the words spoken by the tongue will be corrupt as well. The tongue of the ungodly is an unruly evil, and full of deadly poison. There are so many sins an ungodly person commits with their tongue. Let us look at some of them:

1. Lying and deception – Romans 3:13; Mark 7:21-23; Proverbs 6:16-,17; Romans 1:29,32.
2. Bitter and angry words – Romans 3:14; Ephesians 4:31.
3. Joking, jesting and foolish talk – Ephesians 5:4,6.
4. Cursing God and men, blasphemy – James 3:9,10; Job 2:9,10.
5. Complaining and murmuring – Jude 15,16.
6. Gossiping, backbiting and all evil speaking – I Timothy 5:13; Romans 1:30.
7. Despising and criticizing others – II Timothy 3:3, II Samuel 6:20-23.

God will bring every misuse of tongue to judgment (Matthew 12:37). Therefore if any person is caught up in any of these practices, they should turn to the Lord in repentance. He or she shall be forgiven and given a new heart. A new heart will bring about transformation of life and conduct. The tongue also will be transformed, and such a person will begin to please God in their words.

CAUTIOUS USE OF THE SANCTIFIED TONGUE

James 3:1,2,13; I Peter 3:9,10; Psalm 119:11; 141:3.

Godly persons must be very cautious in the use of their tongues, otherwise they may also fall into sin. Sin with the mouth is the easiest to commit. Below are some hints on how we can maintain a pure heart and tongue before the Lord.

1. Be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath – James 1:19,20; Proverbs 29:20. You do not have to react to every impulse to talk. Especially when people make provocative statements, be especially careful and take time before you respond, if at all.
2. Let the word of God saturate your heart – Colossians 3:16; Psalm 119:11. The heart that has much of God’s word will speak much of God’s wisdom and much to God’s pleasure.
3. Guard your heart with all diligence – Proverbs 4:23. Do not allow negative thoughts about God, people or situations to dwell in your heart. Abhor every thought that can lead you to misuse of the tongue. Instead, let the love of God be shed abroad in your heart (Romans 5:5).
4. Pray the ‘Psalms’ prayer’ everyday – Psalm 141:3. Co-operate with God to control your tongue.
5. Let your words be few – Proverbs 10:19. Avoid talkativeness, either on phone or during visits to friends. If you are given to talking, watch it! In the multitude of words there is bound to be sin.
6. Let your speech be always with grace – Colossians 4:6. Say words that will edify others and not discourage them (Ephesians 4:29; Proverbs 31:26). To do this you need to be prayerful. A heart that is bathed in prayer receives much grace to speak wisely. Pray: “Lord, teach me what to say.”
7. Avoid idleness – Proverbs 31:27. Idleness may lead to talkativeness and other misuse of the tongue.
8. Avoid gossiping, backbiting and tale-bearing – Matthew 12:36; Leviticus 9:16. Deal with these as sin, and eliminate them from your life. Avoid people who gossip and gatherings which may breed gossip (Proverbs 20:19). You do not need to be particularly “nice” to people who bring evil report. Say “no” graciously but firmly. If you frown consistently at tale-bearing, they will cease to come to you.
9. If there is a misunderstanding between you and another person, first try to settle the problem between you and the person alone before you involve an external party (Matthew 18:15-17).

10. Do not judge a matter before you know the full details. If a matter involves two or more people and you need to settle the issue, make sure you hear from everyone concerned before you pass your comments (Proverbs 18:13).
11. Avoid spreading rumours – I Thessalonians 5:21. Rumours are, at best, half lies. Make sure you verify any information you receive before passing it across to others.
12. Lastly, remember the godly principle and apply it. What you do not want others to say about you, do not say it about them whether they are absent or present – Matthew 7:12.

As Christians, if we yield ourselves completely to the Lord and let His Spirit control us, we will receive His enabling grace to use our tongues to His glory. Our words will be **“fitly spoken, like apples of gold in pictures of silver”** (Proverbs 25:11). Our tongues will bless God and men, and the kingdom of God will be built through us.

DISCUSSIONS

TODAY LET US PRAY FERVENTLY FOR SANCTIFICATION OF OUR TONGUES. THAT WE USE OUR TONGUES ONLY TO BUILD, PROMOTE AND EXTEND GOD’S KINGDOM!

STUDY 8
THE POWER OF FOCUS
Matthew 24:12-13; Hebrews 12:1-4

As citizens in the Kingdom, it is required that we put our focus aright so that we do not miss the essence of the Kingdom – dwelling with the Lord eternally. The Christian life is a race, a journey, a pilgrimage. We enter into it through faith at conversion (Ephesians 2:8). To continue, we need faith (Hebrews 10:35,38). We are compassed about with many witnesses. Many have gone before us and many are still watching us. We need to set ourselves apart from all distractions and focus on the race. As the end draws near, sin is increasing. Consequently, the love of many people is waxing cold. The demands of daily life, what to eat or drink, the hardships of our time and the several temptations that plague the young and the old all combine together to discourage many people. These are the things we need to endure to win the race. The King will soon come. He said “Occupy till I come” (Hebrews 10:35-37; Luke 19:12,13). We are challenged to run the race and keep on serving the Lord. As we run, Jesus should remain the Object of our focus. Looking unto Him is the secret of success in the race.

**PERSONAL FITNESS FOR A SUCCESSFUL RACE Matthew 24:12;
Hebrews 12:1**

We are compassed about with a cloud of witnesses. As for the journey of faith, there is no want of witnesses. Right from Abel down through to the prophets, men and women of faith have proved God’s faithfulness in keeping them to the end despite their battles, persecutions and trials. We should remember that many eyes are still on us. Our relatives, friends, the world, satan and his agents, etc are all watching. Heaven is watching us too. Therefore we need to prepare ourselves to run successfully (Matthew 5:14). Especially in these last days when the love of many is waxing cold because of increase in sin, we should make ourselves fit to run the race successfully. There are hindrances we need to deal with if we will be successful. On the one hand, we should set aside every weight. A weight is an encumbrance. It is what pulls you back from following the Lord wholeheartedly. It could be worldly attraction, ambition, the love of money, offences, indulgence, etc (Psalm 106:13-15; Matthew 13:22; 6:19-21,24; I Timothy 6:6-10; II Timothy 2:4; Hebrews 12:15-17).

And on the other hand, we should deal with every sin that so easily traps us. We cannot run the race freely if there is a sin into which we readily fall (I Peter 2:11,12; I Corinthians 6:18-20; Romans 6:1,2,14).

PURPOSEFUL FOCUS AND STEADFAST RUNNING Matthew 24:12,13; Hebrews 12:1^b,2

Victory in the heavenly pilgrimage requires that we understand we are running a race and that there are rules for victorious running (I Corinthians 9:24-27; II Timothy 2:5). We should run the race steadfastly with patience. The Christian race is not a sprint but a marathon. We should run so as not to stray, stagger or stumble. We should run so as not to faint, falter or fall. We should run so as to finish successfully (Ecclesiastes 7:8; Luke 21:19; Romans 12:12; Hebrews 10:36). As we run, we must keep on looking unto Jesus. Why is this important? One, He is the Beginner and Finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). He started it in us and He will bring it to perfection (Philippians 1:6). Two, He has gone through the race before, so He knows what we face and He will help us if we trust in Him (Hebrews 4:14-16). And three, it is His desire that we finish the race successfully. He has brought us into the Kingdom and He delights to see us succeed (Luke 12:32). We look unto Him for strength and support, by faith and prayer, and by labouring daily for Him till we see Him in glory.

Running the race demands that we, one, keep our focus on the Bible (Colossians 3:16). Many false prophets and deceivers will come to preach errors just like we have been warned many times in our Bible Study. We must persevere in the truth and give no place to error. Study the Bible. Search the Scriptures. Be not a Bible illiterate but rather seek to understand what the will of the Lord is. Two, watch pray earnestly that the Lord may preserve you from falling into sin and that the day will not catch you unawares (Matthew 26:41; Luke 21:34-36). And three, labour for the Lord. Be on the firing line. Never retreat but commit your entire life into the service of the Lord, putting on His whole armour (John 20:21; Ephesians 6:10-18).

PERSEVERING FAITH AND SUCCESSFUL RUNNING Matthew 24:13; Hebrews 12:2-4

There are many things we need to endure if we would see Jesus and win the crown. The Lord endured much contradiction of sinners against Himself. We must gird the loins of our minds. We must quit ourselves like men and be strong. We must be willing to resist unto blood, striving against sin (I Peter 1:13; I Corinthians 16:13; Hebrews 12:4). The bottom line is that we must fulfil our calling on earth without being trapped by the sinful and discouraging trends of the world. To do this successfully, we must look unto Jesus at decisive moments in our lives; these are

moments when the devil will want to sway us through deceit or discouragement. One, you should be strong in the Lord when you face danger or trouble (Psalm 20:1-4). Two, like Peter, you should cry in faith unto the Lord when your faith begins to sink (Matthew 14:30). Three, glue your life to Jesus when others go back because they think the doctrine is too difficult (John 6:66-69 cf. Matthew 11:28-30). Four, remember Jesus when you are strong or when temptations seem to be too strong (I Corinthians 10:12,13). Five, let your faith remain in Jesus when even trusted friends forsake you and forsake the Lord (II Timothy 4:16-18; Matthew 24:10,13). Six, look unto the hills when your soul is troubled or cast down (Psalm 42:5,6; 121:1-8). And seven, keep your focus on Jesus when the end seems to be near (Luke 23:42,43).

The King will soon come. Let us prepare for Him. We can run the race successfully. Let us look unto Jesus for strength and support. Heaven is sure while we follow Him.

DISCUSSIONS

1. Have you identified any distractions affecting you in your Christian walk? What are your line of action regarding the distractions?
2. Can you describe the Christian walk with the following words, *journey*, *race* and *pilgrimage*?

STUDY 9
GOD'S STANDARD IN MARRIAGE
Hebrews 13:4; Matthew 19:3-12

The issue of marriage is central in any community. The Church should be concerned about the marriage of her members because the stability of the Church rests upon this foundation. As we examine this subject in the coming weeks, let us settle down for what God's Word has to say. The standards that men set have not proved successful. Let us wholeheartedly seek God's wisdom, and we can safely believe Him for marital stability.

Before we go very far in the ensuing messages on marriage, let us first establish the biblical ground rules. God's opinion on marriage is clear: Marriage is honourable. Whatever may be the opinions, failures, frustrations or contrary examples of men, God says marriage is honourable. Looking at its institution, marriage is honourable. From how God puts emphasis on it and exercises His law to protect it and preserve its purity, marriage is honourable. As we see how God uses it to illustrate His eternal love for the Church, marriage is honourable. Observing God's exemption of the newly married from civil duty tells us that marriage is honourable. If Jesus was invited to such a ceremony and He went, then marriage is honourable. As we consider that the very first miracle the Son of God performed in His earthly ministry was during a wedding ceremony, we are assured that marriage is honourable. Studying the many parables of Jesus where weddings are used as illustration points us to the very fact that marriage is honourable. And as we consider several promises God made to the family in the scripture, we come to the same conclusion that marriage is honourable.

Our text goes on to tell us that purity is demanded in marriage. When we consider God's intention and purpose for marriage, it is essential that the institution be protected from all threat. Unfaithfulness strains the marital cord and defeats God's intention for marriage. Marriage turns sour when immorality sets in. Moreover, an institution that the holy God has formed must be kept holy to retain His glory, favour and blessing. The results of unfaithfulness in marriage have always been sad. The bed must be kept undefiled.

Lastly, our text shows us that God is unhappy with every form of perversion of marriage. God will still judge fornicators and adulterers today. Present society dishonours marriage and the result is sinful relationship. No matter what our post-modern world and the apostate Church accept as norm, any conjugal or intimate relationship between man and woman outside the confines of proper marriage is sin.

We cannot treat marriage with levity of hand because it is not man's invention. God purposed it, His law protects it, sin perverts it, but grace preserves it.

DISCUSSIONS

With these three points at the back of our mind, let us examine the Bible concerning the definition, design and duration of marriage. We shall look at Genesis 2:18-25.

What is the Biblical definition of marriage?

Biblical marriage is the union between a man and a woman, both single and without a living previous partner, by adult decision and parental consent, and made binding by the prevailing law and custom. From this definition, four points are clear:

- Marriage is between a *man* and a *woman* (Romans 1:27). It is not between two men (homosexuality) or two women (lesbianism) or between a human being and an animal (bestiality).
- Marriage is between *one* man and *one* woman (monogamy) (Matthew 19:3-6). It is not between a man and many women (polygamy), or a woman and many men (polyandry).
- It is between a *single* man and a *single* woman (Matthew 19:7-9). Being *single* means the person has never married, or is a widow or widower.
- Lastly, law or custom must ratify it. It may be court, municipal, local, or Church marriage. The important factor is that the prevailing law or custom supports it with the necessary dues being paid.

What is God's design for marriage?

In the world of today, more and more people prefer to live alone. The honour and respect marriage used to enjoy is fading away fast. This is because man has deviated from God's design for marriage. Let us look at the Word again and see what His purpose for marriage is.

- Marriage is for **partnership** (Genesis 2:18). God says, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him." The question is "which man?" Adam. That is the man God made, blessed and commissioned. Have you acknowledged God's ownership on your life? Have you surrendered your life to the Lord? Has He blessed you? Do you have a divine purpose for living? Adam was already busy in God's intended work for him. He did not seem to feel the need for a woman. Yet God saw that he needed a suitable companion. Many things may keep us busy in life. We may be tempted to disregard marriage

because we seem fulfilled without it. Yet for every blessed and commissioned man, God recommends marriage. Not all men are called to celibacy (Matthew 19:10-12). God's commission generally requires the support of a suitable partner. "Two are better than one." (Eccl. 4:9; Psalm 68:6; Genesis 24:67).

- Marriage is for **pleasure** (Genesis 26:8; Proverbs 5:18,19). God has made man and woman with the desire for conjugal pleasure. This is a gift from God. And this need should be satisfied within the marital union. Some false teachers equate marriage to carnality. No. Marital relationship is biblical!
- God equally designed marriage for **procreation**. It is God's desire to fill the world with people. His method is the natural birth and rearing of children within the family setting. Barrenness or sterility is not God's design for man (Genesis 1:26,27; I Timothy 5:14).
- Lastly, God designed marriage to preserve **purity** in society and in the Church (I Corinthians 7:2-5,9). Our world is perverted as far as moral chastity is concerned. We see immorality everywhere. Marriage is God's provision for the legitimate conjugal desires of man.

What is the Biblical duration of marriage?

From Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-12; Romans 7:2,3 and I Corinthians 7: 10,11, marriage is binding for life. Worldly institutions may dissolve marriage on paper but the covenant stands sure before the Almighty God. Poverty, barrenness, sin, sickness, religion, etc. cannot dissolve marriage. The covenant remains in effect till death. God does not endorse divorce and remarriage. The worst that God allows is separation and the reality is that this is also a dangerous step; it is not God's perfect will.

This fact teaches us two things:

- Do not rush into marriage. Be thoughtful, careful, prayerful and serious. Be meticulous in the choice of a life partner. Begin as soon as reasonable and take your time to prepare adequately for it. That had to be well done which is to be done for life.
- Do not trifle with your marriage. The consequences of a broken marriage often transcend time. Give your marriage all the sacrifice, time and attention God demands from you. You are responsible for the health and wealth of your marriage.

Believers should give marriage a firm commitment. Let our light shine in the world, and let us give men a godly example to follow in our marriages. "To him that believeth, all things are possible."

STUDY 10
DEALING WITH STRONGHOLDS IN MARRIAGE
Ephesians 6:10-18; II Corinthians 10:3-6

Yes, there are marriage strongholds! Marriage, just like any other divine institution, faces fierce opposition from the devil. In the world, we see many perversions of marriage, so many that the real meaning of the institution is no longer easily found. On the other hand, Christian marriages face satanic opposition and some homes are confused because they do not know what is going on. For us, we cannot afford to be ignorant of the devices of the devil (II Corinthians 2:11); God has given us sufficient insight and ammunition to strengthen us against all the works of the enemy. Today, we will examine some human and spiritual factors in dealing with these strongholds.

Talking about strongholds, we should understand that we are fighting with the enemy of our marital peace and prosperity. Some mysterious problems that occur in marriage have a spiritual undertone. We should therefore approach marriage with prayerful dependence on God using the weapons He has provided. However, we should not assume that every problem in marriage is spiritual in origin; there are human elements we must take care of. That is why biblical teaching like this is important. It is when we deal with the spiritual and the human together that we will have complete victory.

DELIVERANCE FROM INVOLUNTARY CELIBACY

It is God's will that single people should get married and raise a family when they are of age (Genesis 2:18; I Timothy 5:14). Exceptions are eunuchs who are either born so or, by proper divine leading and gift, have made themselves eunuch for God's Kingdom (Matthew 19:10-12; I Corinthians 7:7). Yet we see some single people who apparently cannot find a match or a mate. What can be the reason? And how can this problem be solved? **One**, lack of seriousness in prayer and carnality hinder many from finding God's will in marriage (James 4:2,3). Such people should repent of their error and seek the Lord for the right partner. They should recognise God as the Matchmaker and approach Him in faith as a son approaches a father and the Lord will answer them (Proverbs 18:22; 19:14; Matthew 7:7). **Two**, some people have a careless, nonchalant attitude to the issue. They do not take it seriously until it is too late and then they risk rushing to the wrong person because the market for them seems to be closed (Proverbs 27:12; Ecclesiastes 10:18). As a single person, do not be caught in this error. Make hay while the sun shines. And if you are there already, pray earnestly that God will deliver you. By faith, you will have favour. **Three**, some people are bent on their own will or selection rather than God's will. They have an idol in their heart (e.g. age, education, social status, nationality/tribe,

physical outlook, financial standing, a particular individual, etc). If the proponent does not match their defined profile, they decline though this may be God's will. The result is that God does not talk to them anymore. Such people should repent and yield themselves to the absolute will of God (Proverbs 3:5-7; Jeremiah 10:23). **Four**, some people have taken wrong steps in the past, which makes it difficult for them to find a suitable marriage partner either because of a permanent damage in their lives or they have come to a life situation that makes them unattractive as marriage partners. Such people should open themselves to God, trust Him and pray earnestly for His mercy (Ruth 1:11-13; 3:1).

Five, some people are under a human or demonic curse either because they breached a (blood) covenant, cheated a prospective partner they promised to marry, offended a personality or because of a demonic obstruction. There is hope for such individuals. Coming to the Lord in repentance and faith, with full restitution where necessary, will remove the curse and bring them into God's blessing (Numbers 23:19-23; Colossians 1:12-14). And **six**, some people have literal, figurative or spiritual (demonic) odour, which repels prospective partners from them (Proverbs 30:21,23a). Literal, objectionable (body) odour repels others and makes it challenging to approach some people as future partners. Cleanliness and some physical precautions will remedy this. Figurative odour refers to bad behaviour which puts prospective partners off. If a person has a particularly offensive character, prospective partners will be afraid to live with him or her. What is the joy of living with an angry man or woman? What is the motivation to choose an unreliable, rebellious individual as a future partner? In vain will these people pray for a partner except they first embark on a fundamental change of lifestyle. Repentance and readjustment are required here (Proverbs 21:19; Isaiah 1:18,19). But there is also a demonically induced stigma that makes a person, regardless of natural beauty or character, repulsive to prospective partners. This might be due to previous involvement in demonic activities, covenant with the devil, etc. Just like a curse, this problem can be identified and broken by prayer and faith (Mark 9:23). Coming to Christ makes us new creatures and we should exercise our position in the Lord to get these problems solved. A believer in Christ should not be confined to the past but should exercise his/her right in the new covenant with Jesus. That is the source of victory (II Corinthians 5:17).

In all, we should couple our obedience to God with patience so that we can receive His blessings in this area also (Hebrews 10:36). Having prayed and done God's will, let us trust Him that He will bring the right partner. Approach your pastor for counselling if you feel this is necessary. The leadership of the Church is there to ensure your life is fulfilled.

DEALING WITH MATRIMONIAL CRISES

God has promised to give us marriages and homes like days of heaven on earth if we keep His words in our hearts (Deuteronomy 11:18-21). We should hold on this promise and actively keep the Lord's commandments. Yet, there could be times of crisis because we live in the world. Matrimonial crises include barrenness or sterility, sicknesses or diseases, financial or material shortage, etc. The first step in dealing with any crisis is to examine yourself and ensure you are living inside God's will (II Corinthians 13:5; Job 35:31,32). Secondly, search the scriptures for God's promises that will aid you in specific prayer, for God honours prayer based on His word (Isaiah 41:21; Daniel 9:1-3). Lastly, pray earnestly unto God in faith. He will answer if you depend on Him for a breakthrough (Exodus 3:7-9; Psalm 50:15; Luke 8:1-8). Believers have the strong weapon of prayer to a compassionate Father. Let us not faint in the day of family crisis. Family prayer coupled with fasting and support from the local Church will deliver us from trouble.

DOMINION OVER MARITAL CONFLICTS

God desires peace and prosperity for every home (Psalm 128:1-6). Conflicts can occur due to ignorance, inconsideration, spiritual immaturity or influence of unclean spirits. Areas of conflict include arguments over money, differences of opinion in family lifestyle, disagreement on the way to bring up children, split over crucial decisions or clashes of character. Wayward children could also cause serious family conflicts. The Bible gives us sufficient means to prevent these conflicts. Where they occur, we should seek God's method to resolve them so that we can live together amicably. Wives, husbands and children have their responsibilities in the home and we should abide by these biblical attitudes if we desire to have dominion over conflicts in the home. The wife should submit to her husband and reverence him (Ephesians 5:22-24; Colossians 3:18). The man should be treated as the true head in the home. It will be wrong for a wife to submit to her parents, friends or any other person more than the husband. Regardless of age, educational or social difference, the husband is still the head and should be treated so. That a man does not fulfil his role in the home is also not a reason to despise him. Of course, God will hold him responsible for his negligence. Women married to unbelieving husbands should still show practical obedience and godliness at home. In language, chastity, spending, and adornment, their lives should reflect sobriety and heavenliness. They should not be busybodies in other people's affairs. They should be keepers at home. The husband should be able to rely on his wife because she is faithful in all things. This will eventually lead to his conversion (I Peter 3:1-6). Similarly, the man should love his wife and sacrifice for her (Ephesians 5:25-33; Colossians 3:19). He should give honour to her as the weaker vessel. It is required that the man protect, honour and provide for his wife to make her feel secure. Faithfulness is required in the man as

well to make the home a pure and truthful place to abide (I Peter 3:7). Children are as well required to honour their parents (Ephesians 6:1-3; Colossians 3:20). Their parents should in turn not provoke them to anger but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:20). In all, we should give no place to the devil in the home (Ephesians 4:27). Many families are being infiltrated by the devil through the TV, the Internet, demonic games and toys, association with evil doers, etc. These eventually bring turmoil into the home and they wonder why. We should purge ourselves from all these sources of uncleanness and contamination so that we can maintain an atmosphere free from satanic influence. If we couple this with genuine faith and vibrant devotion, our families will be strong and we will live in peace.

DISCUSSIONS

1. Outline the Biblical expectations of the husband, wife and children in a home.
2. How can satanic strongholds in homes be removed?

STUDY 11
GOD'S PROSPERITY FOR YOUR FAMILY (I)
Psalms 128:1-6

Introduction

God originated the family for a blessing. At the beginning, God blessed Adam and Eve and commanded them to multiply and subdue the earth (Genesis 1:26-28). Though man lost dominion through the Fall, Christ has come to restore us into God's glorious blessing through His redemption. We can all come into God's blessing through faith in Christ and obedience to God's word. Prosperity is God's plan and purpose for your family. This prosperity covers all areas of your family life. And if you are still single, you can be a blessed man or woman like Joseph; God's blessing will mark you out distinctly from others and follow you into your family when you eventually get married. There is all-round prosperity for a man or woman whose heart stays with God (Psalm 1:3)

DESIRABLE PICTURE OF A GOD-FEARING HUSBAND Psalm 128:1

God's prosperity is reserved for the man who fears the Lord. Many people do not get God's promises fulfilled in their lives because they fail to recognise or fulfil His conditions. God is faithful; there is no shadow of turning with Him (James 1:17). Everyone who fulfils His condition will receive His blessing. The man who will receive God's blessing in marriage fears the Lord and walk in His ways. Whether he is now a husband or he is a husband-to-be, he is marked for a blessing. What are the practical things you will see in this blessed man? **One**, he will depart from evil (Proverbs 3:7; 14:16; 16:6,17). He will not do uncleanness, neither will he oppress his neighbour or cheat other people. He will not deliberately hurt his neighbour or wish/do evil to him. **Two**, he delights in righteousness (Psalm 45:7; Proverbs 15:9; Hebrews 1:9). It is his delight to be upright. Holiness is his principle. He will seek the good of his neighbour and exhibit God's righteousness in his house. **Three**, he devotes himself to God and His word (Psalm 1:1,2; John 14:23). The word of God is the instruction of life. A God-fearing man puts himself in God's hands and seeks to do His will. He meditates daily in God's word and allows the word to rule his life. And **four**, he dedicates his life to walk in God's ways (Genesis 24:40; Deuteronomy 5:33; 28:9; I Kings 2:3,4; 3:14). The God-fearing man makes a conscious choice to walk in the way of the Lord. In his decisions, choices and actions, he seeks to follow what the Lord has laid down as a godly pattern. This is the picture of a man who truly fears the Lord.

DISCUSSIONS

From our passage in Psalm 128 describe the characteristics of a prosperous home.

STUDY 12
GOD'S PROSPERITY FOR YOUR FAMILY (II)
Psalm 128:1-6

DIVINE PROSPERITY FOR A GODLY HOUSEHOLD Psalm 128:2-4

God's prosperity is visible on a household that is yielded to Him. It is God who gives us power to get wealth (Deuteronomy 8:18). There may be challenges every now and then but the godly home will be like a tree planted by the water side; it will prosper in a visible and conspicuous way (Psalm 1:3). How is God's prosperity manifested in such a home? **One**, there is honest labour, fruitful labour and godly enjoyment (Genesis 26:12-14; 39:2; Psalm 84:11,12; Ecclesiastes 6:3). The godly man is not idle. And because the Lord is with him, his labour shall prosper. There will also be peace and godly desire to enjoy the fruit of his labour. He shall not labour for the wind or for the devourer. He will have enough to eat and to give to the needy. **Two**, there will be happiness and health in the man and his household (Deuteronomy 28:3,6; Proverbs 3:7,8; Isaiah 58:8; II John 2). There will be occasion for joy and laughter. Their health will spring forth as the Lord Himself will be their healer. **Three**, the wife shall be fruitful (Genesis 17:15,16; Exodus 23:26; Deuteronomy 7:14). Barrenness is not God's will for His children. Christian families who have a situation of barrenness should keep on believing God. His promise may tarry but it will surely be fulfilled. And **four**, their children shall be strong, stable and stately (Psalm 127:3-5; 144:12; Acts 21:8,9). Godly character and nobility will be the portion of a home where God reigns. Our children will be a source of delight as we prayerfully bring them up to know the Lord. Regardless of the challenges they face in life, by God's grace, they will eventually overcome and shine forth like a gorgeous palace.

DISCUSSIONS

1. In the light of today's studies how do you as a parent or child hope to help you family enjoy the prosperity as described in the bible?
2. Describe prosperity from the following passages: Isaiah 58: 8; Deuteronomy 28: 3, 6; Exodus 23: 26; Acts 21: 8, 9; Ecclesiastes 6: 3).

STUDY 13
GOD'S PROSPERITY FOR YOUR FAMILY (III)
Psalm 128:1-6

DISTINCTIVE PRESERVATION OF GLORIOUS HOME Psalm 18:4-6

The blessing of a godly home is a biblical certainty. *“Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD.”* The blessings of the Lord will make such a home rich without adding sorrows. Like the house of Obed-edom, the prosperity God gives is closely linked with His presence (II Samuel 6:10-12). *“The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion ...”* The blessing of God will not take the household outside the house and will of God. Rather, such a home will abide in God’s house to worship Him and behold His beauty (Psalm 23:6; 27:4). They will also be active in the service of the Lord so that they can see the good of Jerusalem – the prosperity of God’s work and mission on earth (Acts 21:8,9; Romans 16:3-5; I Corinthians 16:15,19). Moreover, there shall be long life and full satisfaction (Exodus 23:26; Psalm 91:16). The Lord will comfort them on every side and fulfil His goodness in their lives. Their eyes shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. God will preserve them from every evil because they delight themselves in Him.

It is glorious to have God as the centre of the home. As a single person, immerse your life in God and let Him be your all. His blessings will follow you into marriage as He will provide the right partner for those who are blessed by Him. And if you are married already, come inside God’s prosperity by faith just like Abraham and Sarah did when God called them out of idolatry into a perfect walk with Him. God will surely prosper you and make you a channel of blessing to multitudes. No matter your current challenges, there is guarantee turnaround when Jesus takes the lead in your life and home.

DISCUSSIONS

1. What area of human existence is your family exercising dominion?
2. Are you contributing to a prosperous family or are you ignoring the state of your family?
3. Using the following biblical references demonstrate your understanding of a glorious home *2Samuel 6: 10-12; Psalm 23: 6; 27: 4; Romans 16: 3-5 Psalm 91: 16.*

STUDY 14
THE SURE SIGNPOST TO SIGNS AND WONDERS
Acts 2:22,43; 7:36; 4:29,30; 5:12; 14:3; Romans 15:18,19;
John 4:48; Isaiah 8:18

Miracles, signs and wonders characterise as well as summarize the ministry of Christ on earth. Prior to His ascension, Christ commissioned His apostles to continue with the work of soul-winning. His ministry of miracles, signs and wonders was also replicated in theirs. During the time of the children of Israel, God wrought miracles, signs and wonders through Moses, their leader. He was indeed a great Old Testament prophet and a law-giver. But the New Testament started with Christ's miraculous conception, life, ministry, manifestation and operation of the Spirit. After His ascension, the apostles realized that the miracle ministry of Christ must continue and therefore prayed to God to ***“grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus”***. God answered their prayers: ***“And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people”***.

Aside Christ, Moses and the apostles, Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles also had a record of signs and wonders in his ministry. Thus, whenever God raises His servants to minister to Jews or Gentiles, He also grants them manifestation of signs and wonders. And what God did in the past, He is still doing today. He has opened the gate of miracles, signs and wonders to bless us in fulfilment of His promise in Scripture. The days of weeping, sorrow, joblessness, delay in marriage, barrenness, etc. are over as we bring our problems and people with various forms of infirmities before Him. As others see God's miraculous intervention in our lives, they will also believe and His church will grow. The sure signpost to signs and wonders is that God is unchanging in His resolve to fulfil His promise in our lives.

1. CHRIST'S SEVEN-FOLD "I WILL"

Matthew 8:7,8; 11:28; 16:18,19; Luke 21:15; John 14:12-14; 15:26;17:24.

“I will come and heal him” is Christ's promise to the sick. There is provision of healing for every member of our families. The Lord has also promised to give us rest from anxiety, panic, fear, worry and perplexity. He says, ***“I will give you rest”***. We also have the promise of the keys of the kingdom to unlock every closed door. ***“And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven”***. Because we have the keys of the kingdom, we can surmount every challenge in our lives, families, business, neighbourhood, church, etc. Whatever

we say or decree will come to pass because we have the key to our desired destiny, prosperity, the joy of the Lord and His power. It is also part of God's provision to give His children wisdom that their adversaries will not be able to withstand. ***“For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist.”***

To receive from God, we must believe that Jesus is our Saviour, Sanctifier and Baptizer in the Holy Ghost; that He is our Redeemer, Deliverer and the One who gives us dominion; that He is the King of kings and Lord of lords; that He is our Supporter, Supplier, Rock of ages and Refuge which the righteous runs into and is safe. Therefore, healing, prosperity, better future, total deliverance, dominion, success are part of Christ's seven-fold ***“I will”*** for His children. ***“If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it”***. The Lord does not want His children to remain comfortless in a troubled world. Thus, He promised us the Holy Spirit who will guide us in all things. ***“But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you”***. Besides, the ultimate goal of Christ is that we finally make it to heaven. ***“Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory”***.

2. HIS COVENANT SEVEN-FOLD “I WILL”

Hebrews 8:6,8,10; 6:14; 1:4,5; 2:12-15; 10:30; 13:5,6; 10:16-23.

The Lord has promised to make a better covenant with us than the one He had with Abraham. ***“I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel.”*** God never reversed or reneged on His promises to His people. His covenants with Abraham, Israel, David etc., were all fulfilled to the letter. And if the Lord was faithful in keeping His covenant to Old Testament believers, He will also be faithful in keeping the better and greater covenant He has made with us. His promise in this covenant is, ***“I will bless thee”***. Through this better covenant, the Lord will perfect everything concerning us. As a believer, you are no longer a beggar but a son or daughter of the Most High God as He has promised that, ***“I will be to him a Father”***. The covenant Christ has made with us is very sure because He has an intimate relationship with the Father and whatever He requests from the Father, that will He do. Christ promises to reveal God to us. He says, ***“I will declare thy name unto my brethren”***. The Lord also promises to preserve and keep us from the power of darkness under the better covenant. It is time for us to forget the past and forge ahead with the Saviour under the new and better covenant.

Enemies cannot stop the progress of God's people. We should therefore not worry about what they are doing to hinder us. With the better covenant, the Lord has promised to fight our battles: "***I will recompense, saith the Lord***". In moments of trials and afflictions, God, the Omnipotent, Omniscient and Omnipresent, the Creator of the universe, our Supplier, Healer, Deliverer and Helper will not forsake us. His promise is, "***I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee***". What a joy it is also for us to know that our guilt and condemnation are all taken away under the better covenant when we believe! "***And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more***". The Lord who has promised us this seven-fold covenant will not deny us His blessings.

3. **THE CONCLUSIVE SEVEN-FOLD "I WILL"**

Luke 5:4-6; 9:57; 15:18-24; Psalms 18:1-3; 77:11,12; 101:1-3; 55:16-19; 71:7.

Though God is determined to bless us, our faith must agree with His pronouncement before we can have the promised explosion of miracles, signs and wonders. When we forget our past experiences of failure and obey the Master's instruction like Peter did, we shall enjoy manifold blessings. He said, "***At thy word I will let down the net***". We experience success, progress, courage, healing, deliverance, dominion and multiple blessings when we follow the Lord's instruction. The Lord has promised to give people who believe His promise a net-breaking miracle.

Every believer needs to make commitment to the Lord by declaring that, "***I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest***". Commitment to follow Christ through is the secret of blessing because He leads to the land of victory, promise and everlasting joy. This requires that the prodigal return to Him in penitence. The prodigal son or daughter needs to say, "***I will arise and go to my father***". Our God is a compassionate Father who will not forsake or reject anyone who comes to Him with a sincere heart. When sinners and backsliders return to the Lord, He restores all that they had lost.

We continue to enjoy explosions of miracles, signs and wonders with the following scriptural attitudes and affirmations: "***I will love thee... I will trust... I will call upon the LORD***". "***I will remember the works of the LORD... I will meditate also of all thy work***". "***I will behave myself wisely... I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes***". "***I will call upon God; and the LORD shall save me***".

DISCUSSIONS

1. What is required of me to “produce” signs and wonders? *Luke 5: 4-6; Psalm 18: 1-3; John 14:12-14; 15:26;17:24*
2. Are signs and wonders following you or are you the one following them? Why?

STUDY 15
FREEDOM THROUGH FAITH THAT PLEASURES GOD
Hebrews 11:4-6

We are living at such a time and place when faith in God is so needful for a purposeful life. We will always need God and we need Him now more than ever, speaking in human language. All around us, we see and hear of adversity and disaster, *“no peace, great vexations upon all the inhabitants of the countries,”* *“men’s hearts failing them for fear.”* And yet, there is no end in sight. This is not the time to play religion; this is the time to seek the true and living God with unwavering faith in Jesus, His only begotten Son. *“And ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart”* (Jeremiah 29:13).

God demands faith, real faith, pure faith, implicit faith expressed in corresponding confession, conviction and consecration if we are to please Him. Though we are living in perilous times, it is not peculiar to our community or this era and age. Others have lived triumphantly through similar experiences as ours. They were victorious by faith; we too can be overcomers and more than conquerors, by faith.

1. TRUST AND TRANSFORMATION BY FAITH

Hebrews 11:4; Genesis 4:3-5; Leviticus 17:11; Hebrews 9:22; Romans 3:23-26; 5:8-11; 1 Peter 1:14-20; Hebrews 10:19-23; 11:28.

“By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.” Cain offered a sacrifice too but his sacrifice was not acceptable to God. Cain was religious but he *“was of that wicked one.”* He sacrificed but *“his own works were evil.”* Though religious, he hated his brother and had no eternal life abiding in him (1 John 3:12-15). He lived and died under condemnation, not willing to repent and turn from the religion of works. In his man-centred religion, he could not attain to freedom from sin, guilt and eternal damnation.

“By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts.” Abel’s sacrifice was by faith, looking back to what God did in providing a substitute for Adam and Eve and looking forward to the coming of the promised Seed who will be our Sin-bearer (Genesis 3:15, 21). His faith was in the acceptable Lamb *“slain from the foundation of the world”* (Revelation 13:8). Man-made religion attempts to worship God with inventions of *“men’s hands”*, *“man’s device”* and *“tradition”* (Acts 17:25, 29; Mark 7:6-13). Religion without faith in God’s

acceptable Lamb is vain and displeasing to God. Whatsoever is not of faith is sin. Abel's faith was counted unto him for righteousness. He was transformed and set free – free from guilt and condemnation, free from the power and curse of sin, free from eternal wrath and judgment.

2. TRANSITION AND TRANSLATION BY FAITH

Hebrews 11:5; Genesis 5:22-24; Psalms 119:1-3; 15:1-5; Isaiah 33:15-17; 1 John 1:7; 2:6; 3:1-3; 2 Kings 2:3, 5, 11; 1 Corinthians 15:51, 52; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Colossians 1:13.

“By faith” “Enoch walked with God” and “he pleased God”. “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” God revealed Himself to Enoch and he agreed with God by faith. God's revelation came to him that, ***“Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him”*** (Jude 14,15). Knowing the judgment of God, he turned from his own ways, asked and believed God for mercy, became committed to God and His way, at age 65. He received grace and divine enablement to walk with God. ***“And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years”*** (Genesis 5:22). Consistently, he remained ***“undefiled and walked in the law of the LORD”***. He walked ***“in the truth” “in the light”, “in love”, “in the Spirit”, “uprightly”, “righteously”, “humbly” and “honestly”*** (Psalm 119:1; 3 John 3; 1 John 1:7; Ephesians 5:2; Galatians 5:16, 25; Psalm 84:11; Isaiah 33:15; Micah 6:8; Romans 13:13). Living each day at a time, it was possible for him to ***“walk with God”*** because he ***walked “by faith”*** (2 Corinthians 5:7).

“By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.” Enoch's translation is a prophetic illustration of the Rapture of the true Church. All true believers who have put their faith in Christ, living and walking consistently with God in righteousness and holiness of life will be translated, raptured, caught up to heaven, forever to be with the Lord.

3. THE THRUST AND TRIUMPH OF FAITH

Hebrews 11:6; Deuteronomy 32:20; Psalm 78:22-24,41; Romans 14:23; 1:16,17; 5:1,2; Galatians 2:20; Hebrews 6:10-12; 10:38,39; 12:1,2.

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him.” Can you be pleased and happy with anyone who never trusts you, who always doubts your words, always questioning your sincerity and integrity? Will you be pleased with ‘a good man’, ‘an innocent woman’ who is always asking if you meant what you said and if you said exactly what you meant? How pleased will you be with someone who professes to love and honour you but never trusts your words? How can God be pleased with anyone, any ‘good man’, any ‘innocent woman’, who does not trust Him, who does not have faith in His Word and in His provision of salvation?

“For he that cometh to God must believe that He is.” He who comes to God must believe that He exists and that He is infinite, eternal, self-existent; the Creator of all other beings and things, on whom all others depend and by whose power and providence all others exist, live and are supplied with the means of continued existence and life. ***“And that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.”*** He who has genuine faith in God must believe that He is not indifferent to the needs of His creatures, that He cares for their eternal and temporal welfare, that He will fulfil His promises, that He will grant salvation if sought in His appointed way and bestow blessings according to His infallible Word.

DISCUSSIONS

1. What is **faith** and why is **faith** important in life?
2. How much faith do we need to do God’s work?
3. What victories were obtained and obtainable through faith in the following passages: Hebrews 6: 10-12; Galatians 2: 20; 3 John 3; 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18?

STUDY 16
PROMPT RESPONSE TO HIS HIGH AND HEAVENLY CALLING (I)

Nehemiah 2:1-20

God expects us to be attentive, retentive and responsive when we read or hear His word. With the prevailing conflict, corruption, evil and the lost glory in our nation today, there seems to be no hope of solution in sight. This was once the experience of the children of Israel and Judea. There was no hope of redemption for them until Nehemiah rose up to the challenge. In order to fulfil this mission, he had to pay the price by giving up his prestigious job. Our ministry, work, position in God's kingdom as agents of change and reformers is not cheap. There is a price to pay. Believers who are ready to lay all on the altar are the people that can become agents of change. There is no position without a price. Does your ministry cost you time, further education, extra-mural studies, promotion; progress in your profession, movement or change? Bible characters like Moses, Nehemiah, Peter, Matthew etc., were willing to follow the Lord and do whatever He wanted them to do. We need to be consecrated and devoted believers, like Nehemiah, to bring back the lost glory in our nation. To experience the power of God and do exploits for Him, we must be detached from earthly things and surrender our lives completely to Him. Whatever labour of love we do for God will be rewarded now and in eternity, if we remain faithful to Him.

ANSWERED PRAYER CONCERNING HIS GREAT COMMISSION

Nehemiah 2:1-4; Proverbs 21:1; Nehemiah 2:5,6; 6:15; 5:14; 2:7,8; Proverbs 15:13; 13:23; 15:28; 16:1-3; Philippians 4:6; Isaiah 65:24.

Nehemiah's fasting and prayer granted him uncommon favour before the king and other people. His commission was to go back to Jerusalem to rebuild its broken walls and restore its lost glory. And he responded very promptly. Our great commission today is to preach the gospel to every creature. To accomplish the task, we must allow the fear of God in our hearts to be greater than the fear we have for men. We must be willing, like Nehemiah, to build the wall of security, salvation, holiness and spirituality around God's people. The task of preaching the gospel must not be done on short-term basis. We must give it enough time while depending on God. Nehemiah was faithful in accomplishing the task of rebuilding the wall. Hence, the Lord gave him a bigger responsibility: he was appointed to be their governor. Believers who have vision, passion and conviction are always worried about the state of sinners around them. The dreams of these believers will affect their lives,

soul, spirit and comportment. While carrying out the great commission, we must refuse the tendency to be over-confident.

Unlike Nehemiah, many believers today think in fear; they cross the bridge before they get to the bridge. They are afraid of opposition in doing God's work. When we concentrate on the threats of the enemies, we cannot get the task of the great commission done. We should rather look on to Jesus the Author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross and despised the shame. Nehemiah focused his attention on the work he set out to do, not on his detractors. As a result, he had no need to worry. When we pray according to God's will, He will answer and make us prosper in the work He has committed in our hands.

DISCUSSIONs

1. From Nehemiah's story how can explain the "divine call"?
2. Do you believe that you are called? What are you doing right now about it?
3. How did Nehemiah overcome his detractors?

STUDY 17 **PROMPT RESPONSE TO HIS HIGH AND HEAVENLY CALLING (II)**

Nehemiah 2:1-20

ADEQUATE PREPARATION BEFORE A GUIDED COMMENCEMENT

Nehemiah 2:9-16; Matthew 10:16; John 15:18-20; 2 Timothy 3:12-14; 1 Corinthians 16:9; 15:58.

There is need for adequate preparation, like Nehemiah did, before we set out to do God's work. This is because satan is not pleased when we seek the salvation of sinners in our communities. Therefore, he uses human agents like Tobiah, Sanballat and Geshem to try to stop us. The will of God is not devoid of challenges and oppositions. We must take cognizance of the difficulties and persecutions that the devil stirs up against us and use them as stepping stones to achieve God's will. Many people shy away from God's work because of oppositions. But with God on our side, we shall overcome anything that tries to hinder us from doing God's will. Like Nehemiah, we should always make ourselves available for God's work when the need arises.

Carelessness on the part of the believer will make him reveal his vision to those who will kill it. For Nehemiah, he kept his mouth shut until the appointed time. He had to study the people to know those who are enemies before he revealed his mission. We must be wise not to reveal our intention to those who will kill it. The world will hate us because we testify against their corrupt practices and evil deeds. They will not appreciate us when we come to them with the message of righteousness, justice, integrity and holiness. Their persecution or hatred for the Word should not make us conform to their will. We must understand that holiness goes hand in hand with persecution and opposition. If we wait for better conditions and opportunities, we may never serve the Lord because adversaries of the gospel shall wax worse and worse. And since our work will be rewarded, we should not be afraid.

DISCUSSIONS

1. What constitutes adequate preparations towards answering the divine call?
2. Identify the preparations the following people made in answer to their divine calling:

Nehemiah, *Neh. 2: 9-16*; **Paul**, *1 Corinthians 16: 5-9*; **An Overseer**, *1 Timothy 3: 1-7*; **Every Believer**, *Matthew 10: 16-17*; **Esther**, *Esther 4: 15-17*; **Jesus**, *Luke 4:1, 2, 14*; **The Twelve Apostles**, *Acts 1: 15-26; 2: 1-4*.

3. Why must the world's attitude towards us not be a surprise, and what must our response be?
John 15: 18-20; 1 Corinthians 15: 58.

STUDY 18
PROMPT RESPONSE TO HIS HIGH AND HEAVENLY CALLING (III)
Nehemiah 2:1-20

ACTIVE PARTICIPATION DESPITE GODLESS CONFLICT *Nehemiah 2:17; Proverbs 29:11; Nehemiah 2:18; 11: 30.*

Many so-called believers in our contemporary times do not read their Bibles, listen to Christ, the Holy Spirit and the Almighty God. All that influences their character and actions are stories from the media. The wisdom of the world that makes us shy away from preaching the gospel will minimise Calvary, the work of Christ and Redemption. We must be active, passionate and zealous in preaching the gospel to the world of dying men.

The fool is the one that talks when he should keep quiet; he is the one that keeps quiet when he should speak out. A fool speaks so quickly or he never speaks at all. The wise speaks at the right time to the right people for the right reason and for the right purpose. Like Nehemiah, they are wise in recognising those who are friendly foes and know how to relate with them. Each letter in the word ‘FOOL’ stands for **F** – forgetful, **O** – overconfident, **O** – overzealous, **L** – leader. A fool forgets all he has learnt from the Scripture about Ahab, Jezebel, Achan, Judas Iscariot etc. Nehemiah was a wise man who waited and watched carefully until the right time before he set out on his mission. Each letter in the word ‘WISE’ stands for **W** – watchful, **I** – influential, **S** – spiritual, **E** – elder. We must be determined, like Nehemiah, to join hands together with faithful believers to build for God with our hearts, skills, talents and wealth. We must rise and build for God’s kingdom; and for the restoration of the lost glory in our society.

DISCUSSIONS

1. In what areas are you actively doing things that fulfil the call of God on your life?
2. What should be the role of our testimonies as we do the will of God, *Nehemiah 2: 17-18*?
3. Explain “wisdom” in the light of *Proverbs 29:11 and 11: 30*.

STUDY 19

COMMITMENT TO THE RESTORATION OF LOST GLORY (I)

Nehemiah 3:1-32

Nehemiah was a wise, intelligent, diligent and determined believer who laboured in prayer and building for the restoration of lost glory. Thus, to achieve his goal, he recognised the need to labour and partner with the wise, hardworking, faithful, courageous, noble, zealous, passionate, single-minded and purposeful people. We must watch the kind of company we keep. When we live and relate with champions and nobles, our thoughts, ideas and thinking will become noble. But those who enjoy walking with lazy, indolent, ignorant, unfaithful, careless, carefree and scorners who are resistant to God's word cannot be committed to getting His work done.

Through commitment, Nehemiah and his brethren repaired the gates and built the walls of Jerusalem. There is still a gate for us to repair today. This gate refers to the church and the congregation of God's people. The house of God is the gate of heaven, a place where believers are prepared for heaven. It is necessary for us to take a cue from Nehemiah and start building our gates today. In building the gates of salvation, repentance, righteousness and life eternal, we must learn from their cooperation, coordination and concentration until they finished the task. It is only people of praise, power and purity that can build for God's glory. Nehemiah and his brethren repaired those gates and restored them to their original state, security, height, beauty and glory. They also fortified the walls. We need to rise and build our personal lives, faith, family, church and ministry the Lord has given us.

GOD-GIVEN RESPONSIBILITY DEMANDING THE SAINT'S CONSECRATION

Nehemiah 3:1-6,8,9,12; Jeremiah 45:5; John 3:30; Philippians 3:13; Nehemiah 2:20; 4:19-23.

Nehemiah had a great responsibility which he concentrated on. He divided Jerusalem into two for easy completion of the work. The people did not question his action because they believed he was led by God and did everything for their interest. Believers should avoid arguing on non-essentials and concentrate on the work the Lord has given them to do. There are seven lessons we need to learn from Nehemiah: (1) **Devotion to the Lord**. Nehemiah recognised that his devotion was to God, not to any man or himself. He knew his calling was from the Lord. Hence, he gave the work adequate concentration to get it done. We should be devoted to building the gate of ministry, righteousness and purity. Devotion to the Lord entails that we do everything to

His glory. (2) **Decision and directives by Leadership.** The portion for each worker was assigned, recorded and supervised by Nehemiah and leaders delegated by him. Each section was built according to the same standard and specification to meet the expectation of a perfect piece. Nehemiah had the whole picture of the work in his mind. There is a global picture of God's work. Leaders should help believers who are engaged in different sections to bring the work to global perfection and limit. We should give the leadership the liberty and freedom to give direction and take decision. (3) **Division of Labour.** The priests, Levites, rulers, merchants, tradesmen, families all took their share in this glorious work. Selfishness has made some believers to be too over-protective. They don't want anybody to interfere with their area of work in the ministry. This kind of attitude is detrimental to getting the task of the great commission done. We should be concerned about the eternal destiny of sinners and collectively carry the message of hope to them. Division of labour with the spirit of unity helped Nehemiah and his brethren to get the task done. Everyone was happy when the different sections were making progress in the work. There was no rivalry or dispute among people working in the different sections.

(4) **Dedication to their Lot.** Concentration is an important principle in Christian work. The greatest results were achieved because God's people continued to expend all their energy towards the divinely assigned work. It is of greater consequence to do one thing well than to do many things indifferently. A man of one Book, one goal, one ministry and one pursuit will succeed. (5) **Demonstration of Loyalty.** No man is omnipresent. Although Nehemiah was not everywhere at the same time, through loyalty from the people they were able to face their enemies squarely. Through loyalty, they expressed their purpose to build the wall and they proceeded immediately to carry out the resolution to build the fallen capital to restore the lost glory. (6) **Discernment by the Leadership.** There was discernment on the part of the leadership to enlist those who had the mind to work. Although Nehemiah was new in town, he was able to recognize those with contrary spirit. We must have Nehemiah's kind of discernment so that we don't commit the work of God in the hands of people with contrary spirit. The labour of the hand is not acceptable when not accompanied with the circumcision of the heart. To take part in God's work, our hearts must be circumcised. (7) **Devotion of the Leader.** As a leader, Nehemiah was dedicated and devoted to the work. He did not abdicate his office or responsibility: he was constantly available until the work was completed. He was an exemplary leader who laboured with the people.

STUDY 20 **COMMITMENT TO THE RESTORATION OF LOST GLORY (II)**

Nehemiah 3:1-32

GLORIOUS RESTORATION THROUGH SUSTAINED CONCENTRATION

Nehemiah 3:16-32; Judges 8:4; Acts 14:21,22; 26:19-22; Revelation 2:25,26.

Nehemiah and his people had a mind to work. And through sustained concentration, they were able to finish it. When the work of God is divided for us to be able to finish it within a specified period, we don't need to argue as sanctified people. Sanctified people are selfless: they do not engage in carnal comparison or judgmental spirit. Like Nehemiah and his people, we must make ourselves available and continue with the work of God until it is finished. This is not the time for relaxation and recess in doing God's work. Leaving the work undone is dangerous. We must reject every form of tiredness, fear, discouragement, disappointment, pressure, conflict, pain or pleasure and continue with the work. The Lord expects us to continue with His work till He comes with the sense of urgency consistent with that from the day we first received the instruction. "*And Gideon came to the Jordan and crossed over, he and the 300 men who were with him, exhausted yet pursuing,*" Judges 8:4 (ESV). To concentrate on a task is to stay without loss of mental energy, alertness and direction through to the end! Even when a task is broken into smaller tasks to achieve delivery we still must stay undiluted. The flavour must not change by the time it comes out through us.

DISCUSSIONS

1. Are there any tasks assigned to you that you have derailed from?
2. How does *Revelation 2: 25-26* encourage us in the work of restoring and reconciling people back to God?
3. Do you know your place in the overall Kingdom work? See Nehemiah 3: 16-32.

STUDY 21
COMMITMENT TO THE RESTORATION OF LOST GLORY (III)
Nehemiah 3:1-32

GREAT REVELATION FOR OUR SOLEMN CONSIDERATION
Nehemiah 3:1; 13:4-9; Jude 1:3.

Christ's warning that the first shall be last and the last shall be first calls for solemn consideration. The departure of Eliashib, the priest, from the faith and going into alliance with Tobiah towards the end of his life and ministry should be given a serious thought by every believer. He used his privilege as one having the oversight of the chamber of the house of God to make a place for the enemy in God's house. As believers, we should be watchful so that we will not abandon Christ and His word, and team up with the anti-christs and false prophets in the latter part of our lives and ministry.

It is dangerous when believers compromise or shift ground to suit their selfish interest. We must not enlist people with contrary spirit into God's work. We must uphold the same standard of teaching and preach the same message of salvation to sinners. We must "**earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints**". And with unity, concentration, agreement and cooperation among us, we will be able to finish well and get rewarded both now and in eternity. There is faith once delivered to the saints. This faith is worth contending for. This faith is repeatedly threatened from within the church. Every genuine believer should contend for the faith.

DISCUSSIONS

1. How does Eliashib (from our passages in Nehemiah) fit into the warnings in 1 Timothy 1: 18; 6: 12; 2Timothy 4:7?
2. Why should we contend for the faith, Jude v3? How does this relate in your walk with God?

STUDY 22 SINGLE-MINDEDNESS IN DIFFICULT TIMES (I)

Nehemiah 4:1-23

Introduction

Nehemiah was a single-minded believer who was focused and determined, especially in times of difficulty, conflict, opposition, persecution, confusion, and pressure. Nothing could dissuade, discourage or distract him. He must have taken to the path of his predecessors that made up his name. When fully spelt out, each letter of his name, NEHEMIAH, could stand for: **N** - Noah. Noah was a single-minded believer who was focused till he finished the project of building the Ark. Despite the opposition and frustration from scorners around him, he kept to his vision for 120 years. **E** - Enoch. Enoch followed the Lord faithfully in spite of challenges and oppositions. He walked with the Lord without deviation for 300 years when he was taken away. **H** - Hezekiah. Hezekiah was a single-minded believer who reversed the prophecy of death through prayer. He knew that he still had much to accomplish for the Lord; hence, he prayed and another 15 years were added to him. **E** - Elisha. Elisha was a man who coveted a double portion of Elijah's spirit. Hence, he was focused on his goal, purpose, desire and request, distractions notwithstanding. He was a man of one goal and destination. **M** - Moses. Nehemiah often referred to Moses in his prayer. He saw him as a model who had the opportunity of becoming a great political leader in Egypt but rejected the throne and royalty in order to be a deliverer of God's people (Acts 7:22; Hebrews 11:24-26). **I** - Isaiah. Through the Holy Spirit, he gave prophecies that were difficult to be believed during his time. **A** - Abraham. He was a single-minded believer who willingly offered Isaac, his only son, to God. **H** - Hannah. She was so single-minded that she wept and requested for a male child whom she would give back to the nation of Israel as a prophet. Like these Old Testament believers, when we see what others fail to see through faith, our focus will be on one goal, passion and pursuit.

Nehemiah was a single-minded man. He had set his face steadfastly in the direction of God's calling upon his life and nothing was going to deter him from it. Like Moses, Daniel, Ruth, Esther, Stephen, and Paul (Acts 20:24), he was the opposite of a double-minded man who is unstable in all his ways. There was nothing unstable about Nehemiah. He was going to rebuild the walls to restore the lost glory. There was no hesitation, indecision, excuses, fear, retreat or compromise. Everything about a single-minded man points to his whole-hearted determination to do God's will. He deliberately refused royalty; choosing rather, like Moses, to suffer affliction with the people of God. Although there was no pressure or motivation, the information he got about the state of Jerusalem made him to work for God, the challenges he faced

notwithstanding. Single-mindedness does not only show in one's attitude or language, it is also revealed in comportment, character and consecration. Nehemiah was resolute and irresistible. Like him, we must be determined and resolute in giving our lives to the work and ministry the Lord has called us into.

SINGLE-MINDED COMMITMENT AMID REPROACHFUL CONTEMPT

Nehemiah 4:1-6; Isaiah 50:6,7; Psalm 57:7; 108:1; 112:7; 119:22,23,51,60-63; 2Corinthians 4: 16-18.

Nehemiah came from the palace with royalty, prestige, position, experience and letter of recommendation from the king; yet, the people did not recognise him. In the midst of reproach and contempt, he was single-mindedly committed to the call God gave him. The great work Nehemiah did could not have been done by an attention-seeking, praise-hungry, self-conscious, skilled and talented minister. Nehemiah was single-minded; and he was dead to self. When he knew that God had set the direction of his life, he committed himself unreservedly to following through. The enemy may want to make us forget the promises of God, the prize of our high calling and goal. But, like the Psalmist, our hearts must be fixed on God's unchanging word and promises.

Tobiah and Sanballat were no mean or weak enemies: they were strong and powerful. They had royal authority and military might on their side. They had patriotic citizens too and noble supporters behind them. They were also well connected with influential people in the inner circle of Nehemiah. They employed some people with prophetic ministry who made him afraid by their prophecies and dreams. Without single-mindedness, Nehemiah would not have had a chance in a thousand to be successful. These enemies, Tobiah and Sanballat, were actively opposed to him from the very beginning to the end. It took a single-minded man to persevere in the face of similar opposition and persecution. Anyone with less dedication and devotedness would have lost his bearing; and the walls might never have been built. Each of us needs the mind and motivation of Nehemiah today.

DISCUSSION

1. Discuss how the power of focus can be a resource in our service to the Lord.
Psalm 108: 1-4.
2. Do distractions and oppositions come only from the external? *2Corinthians 4: 8-11, 16, 17; Micah 7: 6, 7.*
3. What did Nehemiah do to stay focused on the task?

STUDY 23
SINGLE-MINDEDNESS IN DIFFICULT TIMES (II)
Nehemiah 4:1-23

SELF-SACRIFICING COURAGE DESPITE RELENTLESS CONSPIRACY
Nehemiah 4:7-11; Daniel 9:25; Psalm 2:1-8; Joshua 1: 6,7

The goal of the enemy is to try to stop us from doing God's work through his emissaries. But with Christ on our side, we shall overcome all their tricks. No good thing has ever been done on earth without opposition. Because Satan is still in the world, he opposes the work of God. And those who wait for better times before answering God's call will never find it. Some believers, not knowing the Scripture and the purpose of God, think the persecution they suffer is too much and therefore give in. While the wicked men are waxing worse and worse, we should be waxing stronger and tougher. While the enemies engaged Nehemiah full-time, he was determined that nothing would stop the work of God he was involved with.

The enemies of the Gospel and thus of God are relentless. Let us take courage with the understanding that we possess eternal life and they don't. Therefore any evil cannot last forever and we have the capacity to outlast any evil. We must constantly renew our experience and use of our weapons or resources and deny the enemy from reaching his goal.

DISCUSSION

1. What is self-sacrifice, what have you sacrificed for the sake of Christ and the Kingdom work through the GDC?
2. Can you define "courage"? Why is it a necessity in doing God's will?
3. Can you share any experience in which you felt the need for courage in carrying out a task and how did you finish the task?

STUDY 24
SINGLE-MINDEDNESS IN DIFFICULT TIMES (III)

Nehemiah 4:1-23

STRATEGIC CREATIVITY UNDER RECURRENT CONFLICTS

Nehemiah 4:16-23; Proverbs 8: 12; James 3: 13-17

Wisdom is not just application of knowledge but it is doing a thing God's way to produce result. God's way or method is always frequencies ahead of us. His methods are the best for any given matter. There are types of wisdom but God's wisdom is what we must work with to have acceptable results. Nehemiah was always ahead of his enemies because of his strategic plans. He divided the workforce into two: those who were committed to building the walls and those who kept watch with their weapons of war. Although Nehemiah had not been a builder, captain of an army or governor before this time, he allowed God to use him to accomplish His purpose. He was a focused and single-minded man. Like Nehemiah, when we depend on the Lord in the face of oppositions and persecutions, He will give us a better strategy. The Lord gives new and fresh ideas and 'how tos' regarding any matter He has asked you to do. And with God on our side and unity among us, the GDC vision will be accomplished. Wisdom is given for doing of mighty works! Mark 6: 2.

DISCUSSIONS

1. Are previous experiences absolutely necessary in guaranteeing success in what God asks us to do? How can you support your position from the Scriptures?
2. How will you know if the strategy you intend to use or already using is from God's wisdom? James 3: 14-16.
3. How do we get God's wisdom? James 1: 5-7; Matthew 7: 24; Proverbs 13: 20.