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01 Jul 07

Be Ye doers and not hearers only

Elder Cheng Wei Nien

The Bible camp is over. Up in Genting (meaning above the clouds) we had a wonderful time. The weather was cool, the scenery was beautiful, the food was delicious and plentiful, the rooms were comfortable and the fellowship was warm. In the end, we did not feel like coming home. The purpose of the Bible camp was not just to provide a comfortable place for our physical enjoyment but to enrich our spiritual lives by hearing the Word of God. We had five full days packed with spiritual food given by our camp speakers. In the end, what spiritual nourishment have we obtained from the camp messages? Our Lord often reminded His hearers that "he that hath ears to hear, let him hear." When we went up to AWANA, we brought with us all our daily necessities, but have we also brought with us a pair of listening ears? If we have, we would have heard all the wonderful messages from our various speakers who had spent much time preparing those messages. Now that we are back to Singapore, did the messages have an impact on our spiritual lives?

"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (Jas 1:22). During the camp we enjoyed all the uplifting messages, which we all agreed, were very good. However, if we only enjoyed hearing them and not doing them, what good are they to us? The apostle James said that we are only deceiving ourselves. In hearing the Word of God, we are to receive it with meekness and fear. We should come to the Word of God knowing that "it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes" (Rom 1:16). The most attentive and the most frequent hearers of the Word of God will not benefit unless they are willing to be doers of the Word as well.

"Forgetteth what manner of man he was" (Jas 1:24). God's Word is like a big mirror. It reflects the image of the person looking at it. When we look at it, it tells us what manner of man we are. We may not realize how dirty our faces are, how untidy our hair are or how unshaven our beard is, until we look at the mirror. If we look at it and straight away walk away and forget what we have just seen, what is the use of looking at the mirror? On the other hand, when we realize what we look like, we should quickly take appropriate actions to rectify our short comings such as: wash our faces, comb our hair, shave our beard and, for the ladies, put some make-up. God's Word is likewise. It tells us the ugly part of our spiritual lives. Having seen it, we must therefore repent and mend our ways, correct our short comings and go back *"boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need"* (Heb 4:16). We must never come back from the Bible camp and go straight back to our old slothful ways again.

"But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein" (Jas 1:25). In contrast, here we see a man, who not only hears but also *"looketh into the perfect law of liberty"* carefully and attentively. God's Word is the perfect law that can set us free from

our sins. We must therefore study it carefully. When we look at the mirror, we do not just glance at it. We usually look at it carefully and study in detail what we look like, so that we can take appropriate action to make us look good. Similarly, when we hear the Word of God, we must not adopt a cursory attitude — listen to it and walk away. We must study every word of it carefully, meditate upon it and put it into practice so that "*the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*" (2 Tim 3:16).

"This man shall be blessed in his deed" (Jas 1:25). If a man wants to receive blessings from above, he must also receive and abide by the Word from above. This Word is none other than the Word of God. The Psalmist says: "Blessed is the man...but his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in His law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." The most important thing in a believer's life is to bear fruits. Our Lord Jesus says: "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." (Jn 15:2). Dear brethren, are you a fruit-bearing branch? May the Lord bless you after the Bible camp so that you can bear good fruit in your spiritual life.

08 Jul 07

God loves us more than we imagine

Elder Foong Kon Yu

Samson's birth was foretold to his mother by an angel. Being barren, she must have been very happy to hear the good news. She was given specific instruction to refrain from drinking wine and unclean thing. For obvious reason she disclosed the best news ever to the person closest to her. Therefore, she conveyed this to Manoah, her husband. The bearer of good news did not leave a name behind so Manoah prayed that he would visit them again. Manoah wanted to know more on how to bring up this promised child. He must have been as excited as his wife. We are better off than Manoah in that we have a complete manual on how to bring up our children. The Bible has all the needed instructions. It is challenging to bring up kids today as we are competing with technology and the fast tempo of life. Don't think that it was easier for our parents. They had their difficulties too as they had to find the money to buy the stuff to fill our stomachs first. Every generation has its challenges to bring up children. Man's characteristics and minds have not changed. The principles laid down for us have been proven in all ages. How do we bring up our children? Do we wish that they be God-fearing or do we wish that they would soar academically, and then hope that they will draw towards God when they are successful in life?

In answering to the prayer of Manoah, the angel appeared again. The angel would not eat, neither would he reveal his name except to say that it is a secret. Manoah offered meat as instructed by the angel. What astonishment! When the flame went up toward heaven, the angel ascended in the flame of the altar. Now Manoah who asked for the appearance of the angel, trembled with fear, and told his wife that they would surely die since they have seen the angel of the Lord. *"And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God"* (Judges 13:22).

How prepared are we when God answers our prayers? God answers in a way that will be best. In order to train us, He may bring in unexpected events into our lives. It may be sickness, suffering or other difficulties. In going through the path that God has planned, we would end up as better Christians and have a higher spiritual understanding. We would look at life from another angle. Our reference of dimension would be from another plane. We should be prepared to take them as God provides. In the narration from Judges 13, we read that Manoah was expecting death. That was his personal interpretation and not God's. Manoah's wife had stronger faith and superior argument. She met the angel once and she was still alive. If the Lord had wanted them dead, why would He promise her the birth of a son, and why would He accept the offering from them? If she were not around, there would be no fulfilment on the birth of her son as promised.

Can we conclude that Manoah had little faith? Would we think otherwise when we read that he asked for the appearance of the angel? His faith is not small. The purpose of his request was to inquire more about how to bring up his son. He did not ask for a confirmation of the birth. We pray and we believe that God would answer, and He does, though it may not tally with what we imagine. Very often, we only realize much later that God has already answered our prayers when we look at life in retrospect. The classic example is that we would

obviously be very disappointed when we miss our flight on a plane. We give thanks when we find out that the plane we missed has some mishaps.

In answering our prayers, God also gives the strength to bear the consequences up to the point that we can achieve what He plans for us. Why would God give an answer that leads us to a dead end? Remember that He is with us always. "*The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand*" (Psalm 121:5). "*The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore*" (Psalm 121:8). There is no reason that God who answers our prayers and deals with us according to grace and mercy, would want us to suffer until death. Think again and ponder over what Samson's mother said in Judges 13:23 "*But his wife said unto him, If the LORD were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would he have shewed us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these.*"

15 Jul 07
Church Members
Elder Su Ching Chun

Jesus said "upon this rock I will build my church" (Matt 16:18). This rock refers to Jesus himself, for He died for us on the Cross for our salvation. By believing in Jesus, we become part of the church, which is the body of Christ, which is also the house of God. We become members of the big family in the church.

In the book of Acts, Antioch was the first church to be established. The church consisted of many people with different backgrounds, from different countries and cultures. They were able to receive each other, work together and serve for the extension of the Lord's kingdom. They set a very good example for churches in all ages. In Acts 13:1, we see the importance of having good church leaders as they help both the members and the church to grow. These leaders were Barnabas, Simeon Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen and Saul. Each of these leaders had their talents and strengths, and each went on to complete their tasks faithfully, working with each other, and to prosper the gospel. Let us review some of their leadership characteristics.

1. Barnabas was a person who served the Lord fervently, especially talented in comforting. He was also willing to give and always ready to look out for new workers. Remember the time when Paul first received the Lord, and he returned to Jerusalem for the first time since then. Only Barnabas was brave enough to introduce Paul to other believers in Jerusalem. Later, we see that Barnabas was also patient with Mark, encouraging him to work for the Lord. Mark produced good results. Therefore, Barnabas was a successful leader in the early days of the Church and a good role model for all of us.
2. Paul was an elite Jew who had status, education and power. After he received the Lord, his life changed completely and he became one of the greatest apostles. His achievements include three missionary journeys in Europe, building many churches and writing numerous epistles which became a major portion of the New Testament. Paul exemplified the qualities of heeding God's guidance, not fearing for his own life, remaining joyful even when in suffering. Paul's shining example is one all Christians must try to emulate.
3. Lucius of Cyrene was a coloured person from north Africa. After he became a believer, Lucius became a leader in the Church of Antioch and was also an outstanding teacher.
4. Manaen held a high official post in his time. Instead of feeling high headed because of his high position, Manaen devoted himself humbly to do God's work.

In our church today, there are leaders as well as members who come from different countries, cultures and backgrounds. Paul said "there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all" (Col 3:11). Everyone is welcome in the Church to listen to God's Word. In fact, one could argue that the Church is the most complicated place, since everyone is family although nobody is related by

blood. Instead, we are bonded by believing in our Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Rock on which the Church was built.

Therefore, leaders must lead their members in truth and members ought to respect their leaders, In this way, the church can function as one, using the talents of every member to good works to glorify God. Let us all learn from the wonderful testimony of the early churches.

22 July 07

If ye love me, keep my commandments (John 15:15)

Elder Lawrence Sim

In John 14, Christ not only comforted His disciples, but He was concerned for them and reminded them of their duty: "*If you love me, keep my commandments*". Keeping the commandments of Christ is here put for the practice of godliness in general, and for the faithful and diligent discharge of their duties as apostles in particular. When the disciples were concerned what they should do now that their Master was leaving them, and what would become of them now, Christ bids them keep His commandments, so that nothing would come amiss to them.

In difficult times, our care concerning the events of the day would be swallowed up in a care concerning the duty of the day. When the disciples were showing their love to Christ by their grieving to think of His departure, and the sorrow which filled their hearts upon the foresight of that, He bids them, if they would show their love to Him, to do it, not by these weak and feminine passions, but by their conscientious care to perform their trust, and by a universal obedience to His commands; this is better than sacrifice, better than tears. "Lovest thou me? Feed my lambs" (John 21:15).

When Christ has given them precious promises of the answer of their prayers and the coming of the Comforter, He lays this down as a limitation of the promises, "*Provided you keep my commandments, from a principle of love to me.*" Christ will not be an Advocate for any but those who will be ruled and advised by Him as their counsel. Remember the Ten Commandments. They are laid down for His people to obey, but mankind finds it very difficult to obey. Why? It is not because they are impossible to meet, but because of the sinful nature in mankind. How many of the Ten Commandments have you disobeyed? Has God given us something impossible to achieve?

It appears that we might not be sincere in our love. We may loudly proclaim love with our mouth but it remains hollow proclamation without any substance. How sincere and real is your love to the Lord and to fellow members of the household of faith? The Word of God tells us to prove the sincerity of our love. Our Lord Jesus Christ tells us, "*If ye love me, keep my commandments*". Obedience to the commandments of the Lord is an outward expression of our love for Him. It becomes our desire to delight in the things of God and to do things pleasing in His sight. Hence we should seek to know His will by diligently searching His Word, and praying for His enabling to be doers of His Word. Keeping His commandments implies our believing the teaching in the Word of God.

One obvious lesson to be learnt is the fact that all who are called by God willingly repent and turn to Him in faith (Acts 26:18-20). Divine sovereignty does not nullify human responsibility any more than it nullifies human instrumentality. Salvation begins with divine election, and redemption is by the blood of Christ; and regeneration is to be born again. In divine election, redemption and regeneration, the sinner is completely passive. But as soon as a person is called by God, he or she is fully active. No sinner is saved without repentance (Luke 13:3; Rom 2:4). Repentance is the gift of God. We must repent. Indeed, repentance is

a voluntary act of a renewed heart. It is a change of mind, a change of manners, a change of motive and a change of master.

No one can be saved if he/she does not turn to God by faith in Christ. No sinner will turn to God until God gives him/her faith. Conversion is a heart work. It believes on the Lord Jesus Christ with all your heart, trusting Him alone as Lord and Saviour.

All who repent and turn to God in true faith will do work which give evidence of repentance. Salvation is not in any measure dependent upon our works. But all saved people, in the tenor of their lives, walk in good works (Titus 3:8). Good works are works of obedience to the Word of God, works of love to Christ and His people and works of faith. Good works are the fruits of faith in Christ.

Dear friends, do you love the Lord? Can you prove the sincerity of your love?

29 July 07

Redeeming the time (Ephesians 5:16)

Pr Wu Tian Te

Among all the gifts God gives to man, time is always fair. From the king to the last citizen, everyone has 24 hours each day. Not a second more for the more privileged person and neither a second less for others. No one can do anything to add a moment or seek to deduct a moment. The only difference, however, is in how one utilizes his 24 hours. This is a lesson we constantly have to look to God to lead and guide us into using our time fruitfully.

Paul reminds us: "*redeeming the time, because the days are evil*" (Eph 5:16). He definitely isn't trying to nag at us; he was in fact reiterating an important point. We have to redeem our time (or chances) to serve the Lord. We have to seize our chance to do all things pleasing unto the Lord, no matter how small. God promised to "*restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten*" (Joel 2:25), and this is our chance to do so!

Having 24 hours a day each is a gift to all from God. We have to learn to harness time and use it with wisdom; for when time has passed, it is history. History can only serve as a memory, not a chance to do something today. Therefore, are we reading the Bible and praying as a way to draw close to God today? Are we serving in the Church for the glory of God today? Do we endeavour to complete our tasks while we can? Have you invited your unsaved loved ones to Church? Go tracting when there is one organized, share the Gospel with a person or simply attending a Gospel rally? Dear friends, Paul said we should "*redeem the time*". Can we do it? The key lies in not letting go of the chances time presents us with and invests it doing things that earn eternal value.

Dear brethren, think about your daily life. Think about our source of strength. Share God's love with people around us today, and let God's joy be made known to them. Seize the chance to be a listening ear for those in need. Grab our chance to read the Bible today, and let God's strength be with us. Use the chance of rest in the Lord and always seek spiritual growth. And very importantly, pray unceasingly whether in joy or pain.

Indeed, we do live in a difficult place for the world is evil. Nevertheless, trust in the Lord and start using God's gift to us wisely! Redeem the time!

05 Aug 07

Thou shalt have no other gods before me (exodus 20:3)

Elder Cheng Wei Nien

The month of the "hungry ghosts" is once again approaching. The superstitious people are beginning to take precautions not to offend those weird and fearful creatures. To us, believers of the true living God, His commandment is very clear: "*Thou shalt have no other gods before Me*" (Exod 20:3). This is the first and the most important commandment. Our Lord Jesus also put it very clearly: "*Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve*" (Matt 4:10). Our God is a jealous God (Exod 20:5) and He will not tolerate His honour and glory to be usurped or shared by any creature created by Him. The "hungry ghost" story is one of the numerous deceptions created by the devil in order to lure ignorant people to worship him so that he can usurp the honour and glory which rightly belong to God the Creator.

Are there really such creatures as "hungry ghosts"? According to the Buddhist canon of Yu-Lan P'en, Mu-Lien's (actual name is Maudgalyayanas) mother was a wicked woman. After she died, her spirit went to purgatory and was tortured by a group of hungry demons. In order to save his mother, Mu-Lien went to Buddha for help and he was told to worship and offer food to these hungry ghosts every year at the middle of the lunar 7th month. Are these "hungry ghosts" real? No, they are just devils in different forms "*as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour*" (1 Pet 5:8). We know from the scripture that souls of deceased persons do not become ghosts, but go either straight to heaven or to hell. In heaven, there is peace and comfort, while in hell, it is fire and torment. Once in hell, no one can help them, not even Father Abraham (Lk 16:24-26). It is therefore futile for any one to try to help or appease those "hungry ghosts" by offering them food.

What is wrong with worshipping those "hungry ghosts"? To start with, there is no such being as "hungry ghosts" other than the demons who are all out to deceive men and women to worship them. God's commandment is very clear: "*Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.*" But men out of their ignorance, "*when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened*" (Rom 1:21). Instead of worshipping the true living God, they worship images created by their own mind and hands. The demons take advantage of this and threaten men into worshipping them as "hungry ghosts". Satan and its demons have one and only one ambition, and that is to be worshipped by men as if they were gods. Listen to what Satan said: "*I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High*" (Isa 14:14), i.e. he would like people to worship him as if he is god. Unfortunately, many people, filial to their parents, do not know this. They think that by offering something to the "hungry ghosts" they can help their dead ancestors out of trouble. The real fact is that whatever they offer will not reach their ancestors. Only Satan and its demons get the honour and glory of being worshipped.

Can the "hungry ghosts" harm anyone if he or she does not worship them? No good thing ever comes from the evil spirits. Those who worship them are under their control and are subject to their whims and fancies. They can certainly create troubles for those who

worship and yet unwittingly offend them. Our Lord told us that Satan "*was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him*" (Jn 8:44). If you are afraid of them, the correct thing you must do is **NOT** to worship them but to come and put your trust in Jesus. "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house*" (Acts 16:31). Why not come and believe in Him now and you will never need to worship any of the idols nor be afraid of them.

12 Aug 07

The Lord is thy keeper (Psalm 12:15)

Elder Foong Kon Yu

Why do we feel that we are unfairly treated so often? In our conversations, we hear of people getting the short end of the stick (short changed) all the time. In the book of Esther, there is a record of what seemed like an unfair deal. At the beginning it does look like Mordecai got a raw deal. There was another man by the name of Haman who was then in high position. The king at the time listened to him and would do whatever Haman prompted. Haman planned to eradicate the Jews and though wicked, seemed to be riding high and got the promotions. This is what we often witness and hear. There is "unfairness" and this has resulted in many quarrels, fights and led to depression for some.

It happened that one night King Ahasuerus could not sleep. He could have asked for entertainment, a concubine or the numerous choices to please him but he chose to read. Of all books, he chose to read the "dull" records of the kingdom's chronicles. That should put most people to sleep. Thank God that we can sleep. If you cannot, do not despair, God remembers you. Pray that He will grant you the ability to sleep (on your bed and not on the pews). Psalm 127:2 *"It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep."* In his reading, the king discovered that Mordecai saved him from an assassination five years ago. There was no record of any reward. It was not by chance that the king read this portion of the records. He was directed by God to do so. He might be the great king of Assyria but he is still part of God's plan. Proverbs 21:1 *"The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will."*

The king then summoned Haman early in the morning and asked for his view of a reward that would befit the deed as recorded. Thinking that the reward was for himself, Haman recommended that the man be honoured; he should be dressed in the king's own apparel, ride on the king's horse with the royal crest on its head; and one of the princes should lead the horse through the city and command the people to honour him. Such an event would almost be a coronation. Haman's joy very quickly turned to a sense of shock. The king commanded Haman to do according to his advice on the reward. The one riding on the horse would be Mordecai and the one leading the horse would be Haman and not a prince. All along Haman has planned to get rid of the Jews and the eyesore for him was Mordecai. He constructed a very tall gallows to hang Mordecai. Now the table has turned, the proud has to eat humble pie and the humble is honoured. Proverbs 18:12 *"Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour is humility."* Psalm 33:10-11 *"The LORD bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: he maketh the devices of the people of none effect. The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations."*

When you review these evidences of the providence of God, you cannot help but praise and thank Him for what a Great God He is. Oftentimes, a particular situation is beyond human control. The circumstance is such that there is nothing we can do. It may a crisis that lives are at stake. We prayed but God does not seem to answer. Then the worst of our imagination comes true — human disaster, lives lost. We doubt if God really cares. If He

does, then where was He? Be assured God cares. Remember that His way is not our way. The outcome of every incident is to glorify His name and when we examine in retrospect, we realize that it is for our good too. We may not understand at the time when the tragedy occurs. God's delay is not God's denial. We sometimes get impatient and wonder as to why the wicked are prospering while the righteous are suffering, but God is never in a hurry. He is the master-scheduled Controller. He is long-suffering toward the wicked because He wants them to repent. Regardless how wicked one may appear to be, that person also has a soul that is just as precious to the Lord as that of ours. He is God's creation too. God is patient with His people because He wants us to receive the right reward at the right time for the right purpose. If Mordecai were ever puzzled because the king promoted Haman but ignored him, he would soon find out that God has not made a mistake nor forgotten about Mordecai. The God of Mordecai is our God. If he remembered Mordecai He remembers each one of us as well. Psalm 121:3-5 *"He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand."* Romans 8:31 *"What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?"*

19 Aug 07
Abundant Life
Elder Su Ching Chun

The economy grew robustly recently and many sectors are trying to attract talents with high salary packages. This created a vibrant atmosphere in the job market and the newspapers published a series of reports on successful individuals, many of which are young people, who earned high salaries, led high luxurious life styles and lived in up market properties. As such, many people are led to think that success in that magnitude is not all that difficult. With the integrated resorts being set up in the near horizon and the media's high profile reporting, many people think it is a lucrative opportunity to ride on the IR wave. So much so, school conducted courses to cater to the IR business, and in fact many students signed up. The question is: can Christians hold fast?

Only in Christ

Our lives are precious to our Lord, for as much Christ died for our sins on the Cross. Jesus said, "*I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly*" (John 10:10). Some Christians are like babies with fragile spiritual lives. It takes just a little to hurt them. Therefore Peter exhorts the believers: "*Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby*" (1 Pet 2:1-2). So we see, spiritual growth is a gradual process that requires time. No baby grows into an adult overnight. Therefore, we need to seriously put in our time, effort, patience and conviction to read and ponder on the Word of God. Then we can put them into practice to stand the test of fire. "*If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire*" (1 Cor 3:14-15).

Loving the Word of God

Many jobs are attractive in terms of earthly remunerations and benefits. However, does the job honour God? Does the job prevent us from worship? Does the job require us to go against the moral of a Christian? Paul said "*All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.*" (1 Cor 10:23). This is in line with what the psalmist exhorts in Psalms 1:1-2 "*Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.*"

As a Christian, we would rather lose out than to do things against God. There was once a friend who invited me to dinner on a Saturday evening. I told him we have fellowship so was not able to make the dinner date. He was not impressed but remarked that while Christian activities are good, one should not be "too much into it". On the surface, it appears that we lose out some. But are those things important? Although we may seem to lose something

now, we gain more in eternity. So dear friends, are we living a more abundant life? I pray that we all are!

26 Aug 07

Open hands, open hearts, open doors

Dn Jeffrey Soh

When you think about showing hospitality, what do you think about? Many people think about providing someone with a meal or a drink. That is not wrong. Scripture shows us a broader understanding of this Christian duty. It is not just a meal, but the open door of the house.

Romans 12:13 and 3 John 5 tell us what true hospitality is. We share with needy fellow believers out of the abundance God has blessed us with. Hence, the act of hospitality is simply providing for the physical and spiritual needs of someone who has left his home or native land and requires shelter, clothing, food, or the various necessities of life.

How are we to actually carry out true hospitality?

First, we are to show hospitality diligently — “practising hospitality” [Romans 12:13]. We should willingly and eagerly show hospitality when the opportunity presents itself.

Second, we are to show hospitality conscientiously. 3 John 5-8 provides us with helpful instructions. We should welcome every opportunity to minister to God's people. It is an honourable service, worthy of commendation, because no one knows the full impact and blessing of such service — people have unknowingly ministered to heavenly beings [Hebrews 13:2].

Third, we are to show hospitality cheerfully [1 Peter 4:9]. We have become negatively conditioned to respond in selfish and impersonal ways. Thus, we are offended when people intrude into our space; we are upset when people invade our privacy. Accordingly, opening up our homes is viewed as a bother and a risk. With duty, there is a tendency to murmur. “I have to open up my home, I have to provide a meal, I have to do this, and I have to do that.” We may feel like we are being inconvenienced, and we may do service simply because we think that is what a Christian ought to do. We can do the ‘Christian thing,’ and yet not have the ‘Christian feeling.’ So, we are to show hospitality without complaint. It should be a joyful experience.

With an increase in crime and violence, we have developed into a very mistrusting people. We feel that we cannot trust anyone, and, as a result, we have become very cynical so that we are reluctant to reach out to help someone in need. We may be opening ourselves up to abuse. That is a possibility. There is need for discernment. We need to be careful to whom we minister [2 John 10], but let not our suspicion prevent us from doing ministry. We are not to neglect our Christian duty. We are to zealously minister to the physical needs of God's people, particularly those who have been sent out for the sake of the Gospel. There are indeed various tricksters who prey on God's people, and yet there are many of God's people who sincerely require physical and material assistance as they labour for Christ.

Practising hospitality is not easy. It often takes us out of our comfort zone, because we are to welcome another — who is different than we are — into our lives. And in so doing, we risk

being changed. Hospitality is not just meals and a bed. It is a relationship which is open — to the other person, to how God might be at work in them and through them in your own life.

God can use people like us to touch lives. It doesn't matter if we rent or own a house or an apartment; our homes are an extension of ourselves. When we practise hospitality, we have the opportunity to touch lives in an intimate, personal way. People are not in your home for the unlimited entertaining expenses. Rather, they sense loving-kindness and genuine concern. That's the moment when your home becomes a sanctuary for those God sends your way.

Whether we have the spiritual gift of hospitality or not, it can be a part of our way of life. None of us denies that it is easier to share hospitality with family and friends than with the stranger. Scripture teaches us that Christianity is open hands, open hearts, and open doors. When we open our hearts as well as our homes, we're practising Christian hospitality.

02 Sep 07

Draw nigh to God and He will draw nigh to you (James 4:8)

Elder Cheng Wei Nien

One of the problems of believers today is that they have 'no time'. The pressure of work, the demand of family and of society and of high living often leave them with very little time to draw nigh to God. Even their children are hard pressed with time because of homework, weekly tests, ECA, tuitions and other activities such as swimming, music, tennis, etc.! Many Christians therefore put their prayer life in 'cold storage' only to be taken out to thaw on Sundays! Our Lord once said to Martha: "*Martha, Martha, Thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her*" (Lk 10:41-42). What was that good part which Mary hath chosen? To sit at the feet of Jesus and learn from Him. Likewise, our Lord, despite His busy schedules, never neglected His own prayer time. Our heavenly Father is the source of all blessings. Those who draw nigh to Him, He will also draw nigh to them. What are the ways by which God's children can draw nigh to God?

Daily Personal Quiet Time. "*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble*" (Ps 46:1). To take time off from our busy daily schedules and to spend time with God in our Quiet Time is our best 'refuge' whereby we can recharge our strength and obtain help in times of trouble. Our Lord Himself often rose up early in the morning and went to the wilderness alone to pray while He was on earth (Mk 1:35). The apostle Peter too had the habit of going up on the housetop to pray at about the sixth hour (Acts 10:9). If we can be likewise having regular hour every day to have our QT with God, we can be sure that He will bless us. Our Lord personally assured us that "when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly" (Matt 6:6). It's a great pity that many believers do not come to God to claim this wonderful promise.

Pray together in homes of believers. Family worship or 'home altar' whereby believers or members of the same household gather to pray, are other ways to claim blessings from God. The early Christians gathered frequently in their homes for prayer and the Lord blessed them (Acts 1:13-14; 10:9). On the day of Pentecost, the disciples "were with one accord in one place (to pray)...they were filled with the Holy Ghost." (Acts 2:1, 4) Here we see that if we draw nigh to God He will also draw nigh to us and pour out His blessings on us. Our Lord Jesus promised us that "*if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father who is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them*" (Matt 18:19-20). If we want our Lord to bless us, we and our family members must gather often to draw nigh to Him in prayer.

Prayer meeting in the house of God. The church is not only a place of worship. It is also a house of prayer. Our Lord said, "*My house shall be called the house of prayer*" (Matt 21:13). "*Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour*" (Acts 3:1). Note that there was an hour of prayer and Peter and John made use of that hour. A church that has no weekly prayer meeting is a deserted church; a church

whose weekly prayer meeting is poorly attended is a cold and lifeless church. Similarly, a Christian who does not believe in attending weekly prayer meeting is a weak and pathetic Christian. On the other hand, a church whose weekly prayer meeting is well attended is a power house, and the Lord will bless such a church. Very often, we have time to go shopping, outing, chit-chatting with friends and even have time to go to the cinema but have no time to come to the house of God once a week to pray and to intercede for one another. Such believers often find their spiritual lives empty and meaningless. Remember, If we draw nigh to God, He will also draw nigh to us.

09 Sep 07
At the forked road
Elder Foong Kon Yu

During the Second World War, one of the ways to get the invading army frustrated was to remove the signboards and road directions. Without these, it would take a longer time to navigate to the desired destinations. When we are traveling in a foreign place, we put our faith on those signboards to show us the correct way around. In life, we have our goals and plans. We then set up markers to check and to give us a sense of direction. It would be very sad to discover that we (as a group of people) have lost our bearings. Formerly, familiar markers along the way had guided our personal and social lives. Now disoriented, we no longer trust the guideposts and grope in bewilderment toward an unimagined destination. Claiming to be living in a modern society, we have men and women straining unavailingly for glimpses of recognizable landmarks. This was what Jeremiah said about the society of his time. God inspired Jeremiah to write this, so it is applicable from his time to ours and the future. Is our society different from that of Jeremiah's time? No! As in the time of Jeremiah, we still need landmarks. Jeremiah wrote: "*Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein*" (Jer 6:16).

When we are at a forked road, we are to stand and look first. For this reason, there is traffic light or "Stop" sign so that we will stop and look first before we blindly get into the wrong direction or get into the way of another oncoming vehicle. In our lives, we come to a forked road all the time. We need to ponder and then move on with whatever decisions we have made. The church is also standing at the forked road. Will we glorify God in our worship, or will we entertain ourselves? Will we bear witness to the law of God and the grace of the Gospel, or will we tone down our message so as not to offend anyone? Will we defend the doctrine of justification alone, or will we add works to grace? Do we serve God or do we serve ourselves? Whom will you put first in your plans? Whose interest would be in priority when we say or do something? We face these questions when we are at every forked road.

Some of us wonder what God wants us to do with our lives. Others contemplate a change of career, or the pursuit of a new education opportunity, or the possibility of marriage, or a change in the ministry within the church or contemplating on the hot topic of retirement. Still there are others struggling and wrestling with their spiritual lives. The first thing to do is to recognize that we are at the forked road. Two or multiple roads stretch before you. You can only go in one direction. Your destiny will depend on which route you have chosen. It is a difficult choice indeed! **Stop and Look!**

After we take the first step to stop and to look, we are to ask for the old paths. Asking for the old paths is not asking for nostalgic memories and looking at life in retrospect (regardless if it is with regret or with joy). It is asking God for the path forward. The old path is the old way. It is the biblical way. Why did the people during Jeremiah's time fall into misery and disarray? It was because they did not follow the old path. Jeremiah explains in 6:19 "... *because they have not hearkened unto my words, nor to my law, but rejected it.*"

If we make a bad choice we too will be moving towards the broad way to misery. Jeremiah is writing to warn us not to fall into the same folly of going our own way while rejecting that of God's. Others have walked the old paths and have found joy. For example, Paul followed as the Lord directed. It was not a smooth sailing, sunshine road but it was God's way and Paul was delighted to follow. Today, we are encouraged because we can learn from Paul. He overcame all obstacles and difficulties because God has a higher purpose and helped him to win in the battle against these elements. Paul knew that God was leading his pathway so he was full of confidence, come what may. "*Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD*" (Ps 119:1). Paul was delighted as he sojourned on this earth. "*Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight*" (Ps 119:35).

We therefore can learn from the past without living in the past. Like Paul, as we walk along our pathway, we face issues that may be beyond our means to find resolutions. Since God created us and as Jesus lived as a man He fully understands our needs. God sends people to aid us. "*Also I set watchmen over you, saying, Harken to the sound of the trumpet*" (Jer 6:17a). We have spiritual leaders who are there to guide us (to those in leadership, take heed to be very careful and prayerful as your burden is really heavy. Be faithful and do not slack!). So when we are at the forked road say this prayer as the Psalmist wrote in 119:133 "*Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me.*"

16 Sep 07

Have you heard the foot steps?

Elder Su Ching Chun

Earlier this month, the Mandarin congregation had two nights of Gospel rally. The topic was "In the flash of a moment". On the first night, the message was simple but clear: temporary life on earth versus eternal life. All worldly things like love, family, wealth and health, whether they are good or not, shall pass away one day, sometimes in a flash of a moment's time; after which, where shall the soul go? The choice is clear and one has to make the right choice.

On the second night, the message revolved around Revelation chapter 6. It showed us how perilous the time and things are in the world today. The description of the end times matches what Jesus has described to the disciples in Matthew chapter 24 exactly.

1. *"Ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars"* (Matt 24:6). Indeed, wars are currently on-going and set to escalate. Like what Rev 6:2 has described of the first seal, *"a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer."* We know that the first seal has been opened.
2. *"For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom"* (Matt 24:7). Let us count: World War 2, Gulf War, Iraq War and many other smaller wars. The second seal has been opened. It is the *"horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword"* (Rev 6:4).
3. *"There shall be famines"* (Matt 24:7). This is the third seal opened. *"A black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand"* (Rev 6:5). With the economic crisis in recent memory and natural disasters, many countries are experiencing famine and hunger.
4. *"And earthquakes"* (Matt 24:7). Indeed, we see many earthquakes, tsunami, SARS, bird flu and infectious viruses. This is the fourth beast described in the fourth seal, *"a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him"* (Rev 6:8).
5. There shall be many servants of the Lord "delivered up to be afflicted" (Matt 24:9). In the end times, many reject the Gospel. Worse, like the Koreans kidnapped in Afghanistan, affliction falls upon believers. This is the opening of the fifth seal (Rev 6:9). John saw the souls that were slain for the Word of God.
6. And *"then shall be great tribulation"* (Matt 24:15-22) like that described in Rev 6:12-17. *"The sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood..."* This seal has not been opened. But it is frighteningly close already.

The Lord is coming very soon, can we face Him? For unbelievers, it will be an unbelievably frightening time when the Lord comes. Have you heard the foot steps? Since we have heard, we should be vigilant and stand fast on the Word of God, preparing ourselves to face our Lord Jesus.

23 Sep 07

What is the cross to you?

Rev Isaac Ong

The cross upon which our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified is quite unlike the cross embraced by people by the world today. The cross was an instrument of death (Phil 2:8); now it is adopted by some as a good-luck charm. The cross was a symbol of shame (Gal 3:13); now it is taken to be an object of veneration. The cross was an object of offence (Gal 5:11; 1 Cor 1:23); now it is worn as an ornament. Our Lord Jesus bore the cross as the sacrifice for our sins (Eph 2:16); now people (Christians and non-Christians alike) dangle it over their necks, embroider it to their clothes, decal it on their cars, and some even tattoo it on their bodies. The cross, then, was stained with the blood that flowed from our blessed Saviour (Col 1:20); now it is whitewashed and some set with precious stones. On Golgotha, our Lord Jesus bore the cross meekly; He was *"brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth"* (Isa 53:7); now, there are people who fought for the right to display it. Our Lord Jesus went to the cross to give life (Gal 2:20); yet tragically, today there are many who clutch their crucifixes on their way to eternal damnation.

The image of the cross has changed, and with it, the meaning has also changed. The danger today is for Christians to focus on the image of the cross, and to adore it that they are lulled into a pseudo-spirituality that has nothing at all to do with Christ and the Christian faith.

The danger today is for Christians to focus on the cross as an icon and altogether miss its true meaning. If we are not careful, our sentimental attachments to the image of the cross may just very well obscure the glorious Christ who is our Saviour and the Lord who alone deserves our praise and worship.

So the Word of God exhorts us not to look at the cross, but to look *"unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith"* (Heb 12:2), and consider Him who for our sakes *"endured the cross, despising the shame."* So it is to Christ that we must turn our eyes, and it is Christ that we must love with all our heart, and soul, and might.

So it is my prayer that whenever we meet on this page (at least once a month), we will look unto our Saviour and His cross, and as we do so, commune with Him a while through the reading, meditating and reflecting of the Holy Scriptures. Hear His voice. Contemplate His love. Reflect upon His grace. And by and by, our lives will be changed. As the hymn writer tells us: *"Turn your eyes upon Jesus, Look full in His wonderful face, And the things of earth [yes, even the crosses that we hang on our walls and hung over our necks] will grow strangely dim, In the light of His glory and grace."*

No man can come into presence of God and not be affected by His glorious beauty, His wondrous grace, and His amazing love. And if we consider the work of our Lord Jesus on the cross, we will count it as nothing to take up our cross and follow Him (Luke 9:23).

What is the cross to you? I pray that it's more than just a must-have symbol in your home or in the church, to the extent that we cannot worship God without the image of a cross; it has become a distraction and an idol. The Apostle Paul states: *"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me"* (Gal 2:20). I pray that Paul's words will be our heart's affirmation as well. As we look to our Lord Jesus and His cross, I pray that we will see our lives in Him in a totally different light, that there is no greater joy and higher honour than to live for the glory of Christ. Amen!

30 Sep 07

Of power, and of love, and of a sound mind

Pr Wu Tien Te

Coming towards the end of the year, fellowship groups and ministries prepare to elect new committee members for the next year. I wonder what eligible members of these fellowship groups and ministries are feeling about the impending elections. Will I be elected? Am I a suitable candidate for the job? Can I do the job? These feelings are perfectly normal. While we are looking forward to the next year, we must not forget the brothers and sisters who have served zealously this year, making use of their talents for the Lord in the various ministries. Their efforts have produced much fruits and therefore we must give thanks to God for them. And not only that, we must emulate their fervent services and strive to serve the Lord with our best too. Apostle Paul knew what Timothy was going through, knowing that Timothy faced many challenges and would most definitely feel anxious and even frightened. Paul encouraged Timothy by saying "*For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind*" (2 Tim 1:7). Timothy was greatly encouraged to serve the Lord.

As elections in the fellowship groups draw nearer, some of us may feel frightened about the possibility of getting greater responsibilities. I reiterate what Paul said "*For God hath not given us the spirit of fear*". Fear prevents us from using our talents completely as fear weakens our spirit. As such, we lose part of our strength to overcome obstacles and challenges. However, let us remember what kind of God we are serving. Is our God a weak God? No! Our God is the Almighty God, and the Bible says that the "*foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men*" (1 Cor 1:25). Therefore, we must throw fear out of the window and receive the strength and gifts from God to serve Him. I wish that we will all pray for the election of able men and women into the fellowship committees and ministries to continue serving God in the new year.

Yes, God hath not given us the spirit of fear. Whether or not we are elected or remain as an ordinary member, we all must realize that what God has given us is "*of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.*" Remember Joshua? God encouraged Joshua to "*be strong and of a good courage*" (Josh 1:6) and promised him that "*I will be with thee*". Therefore we see three things. Firstly, serving God is not a lonely journey. God is with us. Secondly, we have our fellow committee members and brethren supporting us. Thirdly, we have the power of prayer and the prayers of believers remembering our service. As such, what fear should we have then?

God also gave us the spirit of love. "*There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love*" (1 John 4:18). When we truly love the Word of God, we should not be fearful. Also, the spirit of sound mind means that we do not give up our responsibilities and tasks at the sight of challenges. We must continue to pray, asking God to lead and guide us, and to give us strength to accomplish what He has set us out to do. If we follow this formula, we will be surprised what God will enable us to accomplish when we look back at the end of the day.

Dear brethren, let me repeat "*For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.*" Let us encourage one another, strengthen our spirit to serve and prepare ourselves to be elected, God willing. And at any time, let us serve the Lord with all the talents and gifts He has given us for the glory of God.

---The End---