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**2 Oct 2005**

**“The salt that lost its savour”  
(Luke 14:34-35)**

*By A-P Dennis Kwok*

This is in the context of discipleship. Verse 33, *“So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple”*. From the day we believe in Jesus, we have decided to follow Jesus. We put the world behind us, and the cross before us. No turning back, no turning back. However, Jesus knows it is not an easy road we are travelling. The time will come when we will be pulled back into the world and get choked by all the worldliness, sin, seduction of the flesh and carnal desires, all the evil pursuits involving the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. Jesus knows our struggles; He wants to help us by giving us a forewarning sign. Jesus says in verse 34, *“Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned?”* In order to appreciate Jesus' teaching here, using salt as an object lesson, we need to know something about salt.

What use is the salt? There are at least three functions. First, salt serves as a preservative. It is used to preserve meat from decaying quickly. Although salt does not make something good or better, it can only keep something from going bad easily. Raw meat if left on its own, will rot and give off a foul smell if it has no preservative. Applying in the spiritual sense, can you think of anything that is rotting, dying and decaying? Looking at the world, we see it is going from bad to worse in terms of morality. The world is in a state of spiritual decay. And it needs something to keep it from rotting and stinking. Only salt can preserve a rotting world from rotting further. And Jesus says, we are the salt of the earth. The world will continue to soak itself in sin and immorality. That is where we come in, to be salt of the world. To preach the Word everywhere in the world, at home, at work, in school, we are to tell the story of love, forgiveness, hope, peace, joy and everlasting life that is found in Jesus Christ our Lord. If it were not for salty Christians, this world would be completely filled with corruption and decay. Thank God that He is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy. He used us who are salt to preserve the world from dying in its sin.

Second, salt serves as an antiseptic agent. In other words, salt is used to heal wounds. This is an ancient remedy for wound when medical science and technology is not that advanced. Today, salt is still being poured into open wounds as an antiseptic agent. Again, we look at this world. The world is dying because it is sick with a terrible disease; sick with sin and immorality. Too many have died of this spiritual disease. And many are still dying. But who can help them? Salty Christians again! We must present the cure to them who are broken in their souls. The only cure for them is Jesus who has died on the cross for our sins. Are you

declaring this cure to all the wounded and sick? Salt functions as an antiseptic agent. Will you minister grace to the wounded and dying world?

Third, salt serves as a seasoning. Salt is sprinkled on plain food to make it taste better. It adds flavour to the food. It does not take a lot of salt to make a tasty dish. In fact a little bit will do. Too much will be inedible or become unhealthy. In the spiritual sense, adding salt to this world is like filling all the gaps. Because of sin, this world becomes empty and void of a meaningful life. If we want to live a fulfilling life, God must be involved. And not just involved, He must be our everything. We do not want Him to stand above us as an angry Judge but as a loving Father.

The love of God is that which adds meaning to our emptiness of life and perspective. Now that we have experienced God's love, we must share His love with others. Let us not be selfish. Let others experience the wonderful colours of life even as God has blessed us.

However there is a warning. Jesus says in Luke 14:35 "*It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear*" The salt that has lost its savour is of no use to the land. It no longer makes the land fruitful nor flowing with milk and honey. Not even for the dunghill. At least dung can be used as fertilizers to provide nutrients to the plants. But what use is the salt that has lost its savour? No use! Jesus said also in Matthew 5:13 "*... it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men*". No use for the land nor the dunghill, absolutely good for nothing, Jesus says. Only good to be cast out and stepped by men!

Are you the salt that has already lost its savour? Good for nothing, only fit to be cast out and trampled by men? We are the salt of the earth. Let us make sure we are still salty Christians. Remember the three functions of salt: serving as a preservative, an antiseptic agent, and a seasoning unto the world that is dying, wounded and filled with emptiness. If you are not salty enough, pray now that God will make you salty again. If not, it is only a matter of time your sin will find you out, and you will be cast out and trampled by men. Let us bear a good testimony for God and before the world. I echo the words of Jesus, "*He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.*" May God help us! Amen.

**9 Oct 2005**

**Jesus Christ, and Him Crucified  
(1 Corinthians 2:2)**

*By Eld Cheng Wei Nien*

The church is a big family in Christ. Christ is the head of this family and all of us members of the same family. *"So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another"* (Rom 12:5). Being members of the same body, we must therefore *"be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord"* (Rom 12:10, 11). Although many of us are not slothful in our service to the Lord, we must also be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love. Recently, some controversies have crept into our church concerning the preservation of the Bible. Members began to take sides; some for VPP, some for non-VPP. Others were lost and not sure what it's all about. Papers and arguments were flying to and fro between parties and temperatures began to rise.

**"Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?"** Arguments usually start from the wisdom of men. For, if they were from God, no man can argue. Reasons in support of each side were all very strong and convincing. Appropriate Bible verses were quoted by both sides and authorities of well respected Bible scholars and theologians were also brought in to support each claim. The fact is that, the more I read the more I am confused. Papers began to pile up on my table and I spent a lot of time catching up with new materials, at the expense of my own Bible reading and quiet time. Some nights I was so burnt out that I was unable to sleep. I asked: *"Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?"* (1 Cor 1:20).

**"Am I of Paul or Am I of Apollos?"** The Corinthian church was divided because of this problem. Paul was their founder and Apollos was their pastor. Both were faithful teachers of the Word of God. The apostle Paul himself asked: *"Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?"* (1 Cor 3:5). Paul added: *"For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building"* (1Cor 3:9). Paul then asked again: *"Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?"* (1Cor 1:13). Today I ask myself the same question: Was VPP crucified for me? Was I baptized in the name of non-VPP? I realized from the Scripture *"for other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ"* (1Cor 3:11). I ask myself again: Why should I spend my time chasing after fruitless arguments? All I need is to know Christ who was crucified for my sins. I should be spending my time serving Him rather than reading all those fruitless arguments.

*"For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified"* (1 Cor 2:2). St Paul came to a decision. He would not want to know any thing that the Corinthian scholars were arguing about, but rather to know and preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and Him crucified. We too have a task ahead of us. Our job is to know Christ, preach the gospel and feed the believers under our care the precious Word of God. *"But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes. And the servant*

*of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves..." (2 Tim 2:23-25).*

**We have a perfect Bible in the sense that it is free from doctrinal and factual errors, marvellously preserved by God for us, "for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). For the English readers, it is the KJV and for the Chinese readers, it is the CUV. Let us read it and study it with perfect faith that it is the infallible Word of God. Let us determine not to know anything else, save **Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.** Amen.**

**16 Oct 2005**

**“...Live peaceably with all men”  
(Rom 12:18)**

*By Eld Foong Kon Yu*

There was a farmer who lived beside a big oak tree. One day he saw a squirrel dashing into a hole at the bottom of the tree. He watched and was furious when the squirrel emerged from another hole that was at the top of the tree. The farmer was furious! Should he not be surprised instead? He knew then that the tree was hollow! He had to make some quick decisions. Building another house would mean more money and that when the strong wind comes there is no protection. He had to build a stronger house which would be more expensive. On the other hand, allowing the house to remain could mean trouble. When the same strong wind comes, his house could be under a fallen tree. His family would be in danger. He had another idea. He shot the squirrel. What a strange decision! Do I hear you murmur 'strange'? Sure it was strange. Stranger yet is that each time I tell the story, and then ask the listeners who they think they are in the story, without much hesitation, many quickly identify themselves with the squirrel. The innocent one (squirrel) that got killed by simply pointing out that the farmer picked a wrong place to build his house. So far that I know, none has said that he is the farmer. Pride has taught us that we cannot be the farmer. He made two wrong decisions: first, he built the house next to a hollow tree and second, he shot the poor squirrel. Who wants to be viewed like him? Each one of us has pride which always prompts us to declare that we are innocent or right.

We read time and again how that many were killed because they pointed out the sins of the people. Those killed were God's messengers. They even crucified the Lord Jesus. "*Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us...*" (1 Thess 2:15). God gives each person a free will but we soon develop this into our own pride. Pride, again I write, prompts us to declare that we are innocent or right. We either make our decision based on our own understanding or we align ourselves with the one who has influence. Advertisers play this out so successfully by using some influential people. The thought is that if these people in high standing use a certain product, surely they have made the right choice. The consumer is also proud that he has made the same decision as the one seen in the advertisement. Once we have decided on what we intend to do, we are inclined to be certain that we are correct (including those who killed the messengers of God). "*Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts*" (Prov 21:2).

This attitude of wanting to be right, sometimes too adamantly and arrogantly, has brought misery to mankind. Sadly, the numerous wars were and still are the consequences of such an attitude. We have stooped so low that many of us just cannot live with those who do not agree with our views. We must have our own way and we develop our relationship with another based on the mutual agreement in chalking up the numbers of ideas we have in common. "*Can two walk together, except they be agreed?*" (Amos 3:3). Humanly, we say birds of the same feather flock together. God also instructs us to live in harmony with one another. "*If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men*" (Rom 12:18).

*"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal 6:10).*

The Lord has given us many opportunities of service. As Christians we ought to have a testimony that is glorifying to the Almighty God whom we should serve with gratitude. He gave us eternal life. Our prime duty is to tell others about this good news of salvation. *"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen"* (Matt 28:19-20).

Let us each take stock of our lives and see what we have done for the Lord. How many have we witnessed to and brought to the fold? Can we live peaceably with others? I pray that we put our pride aside and look to the Lord to grant us the talent and time to do His work. In His wisdom He has been fair to give every person one second each time. Have you wondered as to why we cannot get our time in bigger blocks and in advance? He wants us to count each second and to use it with profit for the Lord. There are many tasks awaiting us. Let us dig in and be engrossed to do a faithful job for the Lord. Be profitable for the Master.

I am sorry to say that while we perceive that we are the squirrel in the story above, we are not! Indeed, we are the farmer! We are no better. We have made many wrong decisions than the farmer. Pray that we be a good farmer for the Lord. Pray that He will help us correct our past decisions based on our own understanding, and that the Lord will guide us to make right decisions through His wisdom from above. Amen!

**23 Oct 2005**

**"Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace,  
and things wherewith one may edify another"**

**(Rom 14:19)**

*By Dn Jeffrey Soh*

Christians have had great difficulty in agreeing on what behaviour is acceptable for Christians. There are some things that are undeniably sinful. There are other areas that are not so easily decided as in black or white. These are gray areas that seem to cause conflict. Two of the devil's strongest weapons are conflict among God's people and discouragement. Where two or three come together in Jesus' name, there will eventually be conflict! A church is as vulnerable to conflict as any other organization, no matter how much one wants to serve God. Unresolved tensions destroy cooperation and rob the church of effective leadership. When people take sides, they often succumb to self-righteousness and begin to judge others' motives, thinking that they alone are defending the truth. "But we must defend the truth" one might say. But what they are defending is their version of the truth, as the one they are contending with is defending, just as vigorously. We must realize however that Christians defer on things not because they have deserted the faith but because they are looking at things from different perspectives. The Holy Scripture must always be our guide, and when Scripture is silent, we should be silent too.

Today's news is filled with controversies. We hear of labour disputes, lawsuits, divorces, disagreements, violence and unrest. Competition is praised in our culture; cooperation is seen as a sign of weakness. Competition in human terms: "Who is best?", "Who is on top?", "How do I measure up?", A win-lose situation. The human nature is also proud. It feels it has to win, be vindicated, and if possible, elevated over others. Can these make peace? Solomon writes in Proverbs 13:10 "*Only by pride cometh contention ....*" Contention divides. Church members are bent "out of shape" over things that irritate them which had nothing to do with salvation. These irritants are blown out of proportion as to their real importance, creating disruptions in the congregation. Why can we not cultivate a spirit of peace by striving for holiness? Peace is the fruit of holiness.

The Apostle Paul here in Romans 14:19 makes an earnest request to lay aside the causes of contention so we can live in harmony. He tells us to change our course, to turn the direction of our thinking, because we agree on far more that are of real importance to salvation than what we disagree on. If we will cooperate on the major things rather than on private ends and prejudices, there will be peace and unity. The church functions as a cooperative effort based on divinely designed individual commitment. People are not hired to be Christians. In every congregation, unity is essential for success and division is a terminal disease. But God may bring conflict to the Church in order to encourage change and spur spiritual growth. How the church responds determines whether it has been prevented from developing further or allowed to progress into destruction.

Paul also tells us to make every effort to make peace and build each other up. There are more struggles in the lives of the members of our Church than you realize. You may see

them on Sunday and may meet with them for Bible study. But you do not see evidence of their struggles and challenges. You do not see their pain or problems. Just because everybody seems well does not mean that they are. The truth is that people do have problems that could be solved if the proper time and resources were spent. There is real work to be done than to be engaged in fruitless debates.

How long will a Christian worship in a congregation with fighting within? How long will a Christian labour in a congregation divided by differences of opinion? Will an unconverted person seeking Christ visit a congregation which is openly feuding? Can a congregation preaching love and forgiveness have any influence if it lives in resentment and suspicion? If all the answers point to the fact that unity is essential, then let congregational unity begin with me! Amen.

**30 Oct 2005**

**Are you ready for the Lord's return?**

*By Eld Lawrence Sim*

**Is this world a safe place to live in? NO!** Since Adam sinned against God, mankind was cursed. "... *cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life*" (Gen 3:17b).

Our Lord Jesus Christ has warned His disciples while He was on earth that there will be signs for the coming of the Son of man, which has been foretold and recorded in the Bible for our understanding, and we are forewarned. "*For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places*" (Matt 24:5-7).

**Is there peace and safety in our life? NO!** Our life is like a vapour. In this wicked world, we don't know when the next suicide-bomber will strike. Thus, everyday we are living in fear. We live in fear of terrorism, wars, natural disasters, pestilences, etc. Just ponder over the last five years — what were the wars, terrorism, disasters and pestilences that we have encountered? There was the 11 Sept 2001 in US, the Bali bombing on 12 Oct 2002, the Iraq war which started on 17 Mar 2003, SARS in 2003, bird flu, pig virus, mad-cow disease, earthquakes, tsunami on 24 Dec 2004, bomb blasts in London on 7 Jul 2005, then bomb blasts in Saudi & Egypt on 22 Jul 2005, flooding in India from Jun to Sep 2005, Hurricane Katrina in US in Aug/Sep 05, Hurricane Rita in Sep 05, Typhoon Longwang hit Taiwan and China in early Oct 2005, earthquakes in Japan on 16 Oct 2005, Dengue Fever in Singapore (more than 11,000 infected in 2005) and several Asian countries, Bali bombing again on 1 Oct 2005, twin bomb blasts in Southern Thailand on 5 Oct 05, South Asia earthquakes on 8 Oct 05 involving Pakistan, Afghanistan and India (more than 40,000 killed, 65,000 injured, about 3 million lost their homes), carnage in Russian City by Chechen rebels on 13 Oct 05, fear of Flu Pandemic, and latest Hurricane Wilma which is reported to be more dangerous than Katrina hitting US again. What's next?

On Saturday 15 Oct 2005, the Straits Times newspaper carried a Special Report entitled "Our Angry Earth?" It feels like the last 11 months are the most shattering year ever. There have been non-stop natural disasters, starting from last December 2004's tsunami, the March 2005 Sumatra earthquake, Hurricane Katrina, Rita and Stan in the past two months, the Kashmir earthquake and latest Hurricane Wilma. The death toll and doomsday predictions are on the rise. Are you not worried? Recent natural disasters do not spell the end of the world, but watch out, for the Lord's return is very near, even at the door.

God wants us to obey His commandments but we are weak and we sin against God now and then. Despite our sinfulness, God still loves us and is graciously waiting for us to repent.

All of us come into this world as a traveler, sojourning through this planet earth day by day. There was absolutely nothing that we brought with us, except our naked body. Through the grace of God we grow but we have to labour and toil in our life. One day we shall meet our Lord to give an account of our doings. The question is: Are you doing His Will and walking with Him daily? If you have not, come to Him now, today. Why tarry? When the Lord Jesus returns, He will ask you what you have done for Him. What would your reply be? Are you ready for His coming again? Remember the Parable of the Ten Virgins in Matthew 25:1-12 and the Lord's warning "*Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh*" (Matt 25:13).

Do you have peace in your heart today? If not, why? God promised that He would not leave us alone but we are confronted daily by the disasters, pestilences, wars, murders, liars, fraud, hatred, etc. Why? Isn't this prophesied in the Bible? The Lord warns of these occurrences in the end-times.

Dear brethren, be not discouraged but look to God as He has promised "*Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the LORD*" (Psalm 31:24).

Obedience comes out of love and God wants us to be obedient to Him. Pray about it and ask God to help you. **So, are you ready for the Lord's return?** Remember God's promise to His children. "*Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you*" (Matt 7:7).

May the Lord be merciful and gracious to us!

**6 Nov 2005**  
**The truth shall make you free**  
**(John 8:32)**

*By AP Dennis Kwok*

In a world searching for the truth, dear friends, the truth is closer than we think. He stands with us as the glorious King of kings and Lord of lords. For Jesus says, "*I am the way, the TRUTH and the life, no man cometh unto the Father but by Me.*" And He also said, "*Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*". It is only through knowing Christ that a person becomes truly free, by the truth that He brings and through the redemption He obtained at Calvary on our behalf. But what are we free from?

First, we are free from ignorance, primarily the ignorance of spiritual things. A man who does not know the teaching of the Word of God or the basic fundamental truths of the Christian faith cannot come to Christ for salvation. They are in bondage to their spiritual ignorance. The Jewish religious leaders were ignorant of spiritual things. They were religious men, even teachers and experts of the Law of Moses, yet they know not the truth. They thought that just by being descendents of Abraham gave them a special path to Heaven. One Jewish Rabbi at that time even advocated that Abraham sat at the gates of Hell and would not allow any of his descendents to enter. So strong was their pride in their genealogy and heritage. But genealogy and heritage are not good enough. You must know the Truth, receive the Truth and obey that Truth.

Second, the truth has the power not only to free us from spiritual ignorance but also from the bondage of our sins. Sin of any kind has the power to enslave us. At first it may seem like innocent fun, and very enjoyable. If it is not, we would not be addicted to it in the first place. Oftentimes, we thought we are in control of sin but before we know it, we give in out of weakness and let sin control us instead. That is how vulnerable and weak we are, my friends. But the good news of the truth is that Jesus has also made it possible for us to break that power of sin in our lives. He frees us from the guilt and penalty of our sins, and also from the power that sin has over us today. We have the ability given by Christ to stand against temptation and sin. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. That is the good news. But do you want to hear the bad news: not everyone wants to be free. Not everyone wants to hear the truth. The religious leaders were standing right in front of the truth, hearing Jesus speak the truth but they couldn't hear it. Why? Because they had no room for His word. They had no room because of their spiritual pride. When confronted with overwhelming evidence of who Jesus was, and the truth He was speaking, they refused to believe. They could not accept it because their minds were already made up.

So what should our response be? First, we must seek to know the truth. Jesus said "*Ye shall know the truth*". With so many variations of truth floating around, what can we use as a standard for the truth? Jesus said in John 17:17, "*Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth*". God's Word is Truth. The truth of the world keeps shifting and changing. In a world where something is changing every day, will you want to put your faith in something you can't depend on tomorrow? Matthew 24:35 says, "*Heaven and earth shall pass away but*

*My Word shall not pass away.*" God's Word has stood the test of time. You can trust it absolutely. Moreover, Jesus who is the same yesterday, today and forever, and the Living Word, said it and gave us His Written Word. There is no mistake about it. So make it a point to know the Word so that you may know the Truth from that Word.

Second, make it a point not only to know the truth, but also to live out the truth. Now that is a bit tougher. The truth is not just something you simply know and walk away doing nothing, it is something that requires your reaction. It is something you must practise. It is something you must apply. It is something you must obey. It is something you must follow. It is not like an intellectual tour through the Bible. It is something you put in your life. We ought to be living Bibles. This is expected of us as Christ's disciples.

Now we have heard God's Word, have we not? Now you know the truth, do you not? Now the truth has made you free, did it not? May we be found to be "*he that is of God that heareth God's words*" (John 8:47). And that we may say, "Indeed we have known the Truth and is still knowing the Truth; and indeed the Truth has made us free and is still making us free". Let us no more be in the bondage of ignorance and in the bondage of sin for we shall know the Truth and the Truth shall make us free. May God help us! Amen.

**13 Nov 2005**

**A high priest over the house of God  
(Hebrews 10:20-25)**

*By Elder Cheng Wei Nien*

The church is a big family of our Lord's household. It is also the house of God. We have a high priest over this house and He is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ, who is also the builder of this house. We believers are honoured and highly privileged to be members of this household which Christ has purchased with His own precious blood. Too often, we treat this house as only a house of religious gatherings or a place for theological debates. While it is always good for us believers to study and search deep into the scripture, we must not lose sight that this is a house of prayer and worship. It is a place where we come right to His holy presence. How then must we approach this house of God?

*"Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith".* How can sinners like us come close to the all holy God except by the grace of our Lord and the assurance that we have a great high priest, our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, rose from His death and is now our Advocate before the almighty God our Father in heaven. Those who come near to Him must have a true heart in full assurance of this faith. Sometimes our hearts are so encumbered by doctrines and theology that we forget that we are saved not by works, or doctrines, but by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. We argue and boast to each other about matters which we regard as vitally important for our salvation, and forget that it is only *"by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast"* (Eph 2:8-9).

*"Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering".* We have a high priest over the house of God, even this blessed Jesus, whom we confess to be our Saviour and Lord, who presides over all the affairs of the whole church. Do we therefore hold fast to this profession of our faith without wavering or do we allow matters of controversies to come and disrupt the peace of our church and destroy the precious faith that we have in Him, which we have held so dear to our hearts all these years? May God be merciful to us and to His church. For those of us who are tempted to give up, or are discouraged, let us be assured that *"He is faithful that promised"*. Let us therefore hold fast to His promise and not follow the ways of men. Our ultimate goal must be to trust Him and serve Him without wavering, till He comes. Our faith should be in Jesus and not men.

*"Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works".* The outward manifestation of our faith must be our love for one another. *"For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"* (1 Jn 4:20). Believers ought to have a tender consideration and concern for fellow believers and be sensitive to their weaknesses and needs. We should provoke one another unto love and good works rather than unto wrath, strife and contention. Consider others' point of view and *"not to think of himself (ourselves) more highly than he (we) ought to think"* (Rom 12:3). Let our love for one another and love of our Lord's church override all our differences. *"And though*

*I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing' (1 Cor 13:2). Dear brethren, let us put away our differences and rather provoke one another unto love and good works.*

***"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together"***. The worst thing that can happen to a church, which is overtaken by strife and contention, is that some will leave the church and forsake their assembling with God's people. Instead of leaving, let us bring all our problems to the Lord in prayer. He has promised to hear all our prayers (Jn 14:13, 15:16). Remember, *"We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need"* (Heb 4:15-16). Amen.

**20 Nov 2005**

**Live Peaceably with all men**

*By Elder Foong Kon Yu*

What is your reaction when you see a crocodile clamps its jaws on a helpless deer? As a spectator we think of this as cruelty (even while watching this on television). We hope that the prey would escape. To the crocodile, this is good as it is food provided so that it can live and produce the next generation. God created the crocodile and the deer. He would provide for both animals (Read Job 38:39-41). To a farmer, the crocodile helps him get rid of another pest that would potentially eat his crops. To some, the rabbit is cute and looks excellent as a pet, whereas to others, rabbits are pests, devouring their crops, and yet to some, the rabbit is but a good source of meat (rabbit meat is sold in many countries just like we sell chicken here). Well, by now, you probably know that I am trying to put a point forward on perspective. You probably got the clue that I am writing about perspective. Our perspective is influenced and developed by our environment through reading, listening and first hand experience coupled with our pride to prove for ourselves that we are right. That is why there is never ending argument as to whether fire is a master or a servant. Notice that I did not choose "chicken or egg". God created chickens first (Gen 1:21-22), then they laid eggs for producing their kind.

The greatest sinful nature of man is pride. Each one of us wants to be right. We like to have our last say. For this reason, there are lawyers and judges to interpret and argue on our written laws. Every word of the law is written as clearly as possible but people are able to find "loop holes" to get around them. Similarly God has written to instruct, guide and most important of all, to show us how to get to heaven through the acceptance of Jesus Christ as our Saviour. How is it then in our witnessing, so many people question us about the gospel (some questions are genuine while many are out to scorn) which is so simple and plain? The world says, "Seeing is believing". If this is so, why does the majority of the world believe and teach evolution in school? Proof of creation is abounding within our sight and reach. I wonder if any zoo keeper has ever seen a monkey evolve to human. However, humans have not stopped arguing on the topic of creation or for that matter on any other topic. Why?

Did God know that we would end up arguing all the time? Of course He does. We read in our scriptures that our forefathers have not stopped arguing and quarrelling since the time of Adam and Eve. People try to justify with their own reasoning. Facts are twisted and honesty is suppressed to discredit the opposition. Are we not taught to be forbearing, to love one another? We choose to ignore the very verses we commit to memory. *"Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye"* (Col 3:12-13). We should read the whole 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter of Colossians again and yet again! Shame on us as Christians who believe on the Word of God but we choose to live by our own sinful pride rather than let the Lord control our thoughts and actions! We thrashed our gratitude and all our ethics for the sake of winning. We ignore instructions and shut out our minds to only what we like to listen.

Brethren, we stumble our young fellow believers by our war-mongering attitude! You take care of yourself and let God take care of His affairs. Do not use God's name in vain to justify your behaviour! *"Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts"* (Prov 21:2). *"The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death"* (Prov 21:6). *"God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged"* (Rom 3:4). We ought to come before the holy Throne of Grace and examine ourselves if we have obeyed this simple commandment.

I conclude with a few verses and if we cannot abide by them we will be miserably failing as we give in to our own pride again and live in bondage to self. *"Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you"* (2 Cor 13:11b). *"Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled"* (Heb 12:14-15). *"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith"* (Gal 6:10).

Thanks be unto God there is real peace in heaven. Amen!

**27 Nov 2005**

## **Growing through adversity**

*By Yang De Gang*

*"Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more: That which I see not teach thou me: if I have done iniquity, I will do no more" (Job 34:31-32).*

The world we live in today is surrounded by acts of terror and terrible diseases. *"Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble"* (Job 14:1). Indeed, oftentimes we call this world the "valley of tears", for trouble and pain pervade our lives. The children of God are not spared such sufferings as the Bible has already warned us to *"think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you"* (1 Pet 4:12). More importantly, we should prepare ourselves to face such adversities. Every cloud has a silver lining and even the most devastating storm will pass. Let us consider three ways in which the Bible has taught us how adversities can help us grow spiritually.

### **1. Adversities teach obedience**

Daniel saw the righteousness of God when God punished the Israelites. *"O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces... because we have sinned against thee" (Dan 9:7-8). Therefore hath the Lord watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us: for the Lord our God is righteous in all his works which he doeth: for we obeyed not his voice" (Dan 9:14).*

One's true faith can only be shown in times of adversity; oftentimes, have we not been found to murmur against God and blame Him during times of trial? However, who are we to question God, let alone to challenge Him? Through adversity, we must learn to obey and be thankful to God without looking at the situation we are in. May we be able to echo with Job, when he said *"The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21).*

### **2. Adversities teach humility**

It is not unusual to hear murmurings mixed with anguish and even questions to God when troubles strike, especially when our loved ones are taken away. We do not understand why God would take away the young child we all adored so much. Humility, as we learn from the Bible, is to put all our faith in God, for God has the best for us in His own time. Job had set an example for us when he proclaimed *"I will say unto God, Do not condemn me; shew me wherefore thou contendest with me" (Job 10:2). Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments. I would know the words which he would answer me, and understand what he would say unto me. Will he plead against me with his great power? No; but he would put*

*strength in me. There the righteous might dispute with him; so should I be delivered for ever from my judge" (Job 23:3-7).*

Joshua, likewise, provided another example (see Joshua 7:6-9) to wait upon God faithfully even as trouble strikes. Paul also experienced the same thing. "*Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*" he said.

### **3. Adversities teach us to be perfect**

God uses adversities to guide us away from our sinful ways. "*Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt 5:48).* We need to be perfect, and the method God sometimes uses is to make us go through some form of suffering. "*He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Prov 28:13).* The objective of God's lessons to us is for us to confess our sins and learn to be perfect.

We have all heard God's gentle voice of love calling out to His children. The rod is used at times, but solely for the love of His children.

Let us grow through the adversities that God has prepared for us. Amen!

**04 Dec 2005**  
**No Greater Joy!**

*By AP Dennis Kwok*

*"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth " (3 Jn 4).*

We live in a world of changes — some for the better and some for the worst. Some children turn out to be good and obedient but there are others who become the exact opposite. Far too many a mother or father has wept bitterly over a wayward son or daughter. Sometimes words are not adequate to describe the depth of pain and sorrow that adds to a broken heart. On the other hand, when children turn out right, imagine the thrill of joy the parents experience. Instead of flowing tears of grief, tears of inexpressible joy are shed. When our children succeed in life, it brings to us a satisfaction which is unusually sweet. Such are the burdens and joys of parenthood.

The Apostle John spoke of such a joy. He was speaking as a spiritual father. There is a close similarity between how a spiritual father feels for his spiritual children and how a natural Christian father or mother feels for their children. John revealed the heart of a good spiritual father (shepherd). His desire was to see them follow the Lord fully. Any shepherd who does not know or care how God's people are walking is neither worthy of the title nor worth following. God has entrusted him His dear lambs to feed, nurture, protect and develop. When one goes astray, he must be troubled. When one found intimacy with God in a fresh and living way, he must be overjoyed. This is the kind of pastoral concern which is exhibited by the apostle John.

The apostle has indicated clearly that his joy is to hear that his spiritual children walk in truth. For a shepherd, there can be no greater fulfillment and joy than to see lives transformed and changed for Jesus. Which good shepherd does not desire his sheep to be in good shape? And which sheep does not desire such a good shepherd?

However, the role of a shepherd is not limited to the pastor or the spiritual leaders of the church. Every family has a shepherd at home — the father; if no father, then the mother. There are some parents whose minds and hearts are so conformed to the things of this world that the joy which they may have over their children is anything but the truth. Unless the parents walk in truth, they have no desire for their children to walk in truth. There are many who are more concerned with grades in school than whether their children's minds are renewed spiritually. If our children lose the crown of eternal life, there will be no consolation even if they have won high honours in the academic world. They may achieve every good success in secular business, making money by the truckload, but they will not be able to spend one dollar in hell. Yet there are parents who are more concerned with these earthly things than with the heavenly things that really count. Our children have more than just a physical body — they have a living soul.

To all Christian parents, do you desire your children to walk in truth? Are you more than happy to hear your **children walk in truth**? We know that whatever our children accomplish in this life can never be compared with the spiritual accomplishment for Jesus. When we know their souls are eternally secured and constantly connected with Jesus, this thought can bring such an immeasurable joy to our hearts.

However walking in truth is more than just knowing the truth. To know the truth is very good. Indeed, this is where we all must start. But we must never stop there. We must move from *knowing* the truth to keep **walking in truth**. To *know* the truth is good, but to *walk* in truth is far better. Of what truth is John speaking? First, he was speaking of the truth of God pertaining to salvation. Unless that truth is applied to our children's lives, all else will be in vain. Second, he is also speaking of the truth of God pertaining to righteous living. To be found **walking in truth** means that we live our lives in such a way that is pleasing to the One who is called the Way, the Truth, and the Life. What Christian parent would not be overwhelmed by joy to see their children living this way? And **to hear** of them living this way is even better. Our children may act a certain way around us and a different way when we are not around. But, **to hear** that they **walk in truth** even when we are not around is a joyful thing indeed. There is no greater joy than this. How true, is it not? May God help us to walk in truth. Amen.

**11 Dec 2005**

**“He came unto His own, and His own received Him not”  
(John 1:9-12)**

*By Elder Cheng Wei Nien*

Christmas is at our doorstep. Orchard Road is lit up and Christmas shoppers, young and old, flock to the boutiques and shops to search for their favourite dresses, or to buy something nice to give to their loved ones as Christmas presents. Delightful Christmas carols can be heard from shop to shop and even the night clubs and cabarets, would not want to miss out in the fun and excitement of Christmas. As usual, the whole world seems to be excited about Christmas. Christians and non-Christians alike join hands to enjoy the happiness of the coming festive season. The question is: How many of these people know what Christmas is all about?

*“He was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world”. At Christmas, there is no shortage of lights. However these lights can only light up the streets and shops and not the lives of men and women who are living in spiritual darkness. Jesus came to bring true light to their lives. “In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not” (Jn 1:4-5). Despite all the electric bulbs that shine in the world, the world is in spiritual darkness. Jesus was born into the world to save mankind from this darkness. He is the light that shines into the world. Sadly, the people of the world cannot comprehend it and therefore continue to live in darkness and in their sins. Even though they celebrate Christmas, they do not know who Jesus is and why He was born into the world.*

*“He was in the world...and the world knew Him not”. Christmas is to remind us of the birth of Jesus, the Son of God, who was willing to leave His heavenly glory and became the Son of man and to be born into this sinful world to suffer and die for our sins; so that those who believe in Him “should not perish but have everlasting life”. While He was in the world, He taught the people the truth and healed them from their diseases, both physically and spiritually, and did many wonderful miracles. Yet, the people did not know Him. Instead of believing in Him and following Him, they crucified Him. It is even so today. When men and women come together to celebrate Christmas, all they know is that Christmas is a time for them to get together to eat, drink and be merry, and tomorrow they perish. But the truth is that Jesus was born because God is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet 3:9).*

*“He came unto His own, and His own received Him not”. He came, not just to the world which He owned but also to save the people whom He loved. However, the people whom He came to save rejected Him. They prefer not to have Him. Instead, they rather have their worldly entertainments and indulgences and continue to live in their own sinful ways, to their own detriment and death. Today, men and women enjoy Christmas but refuse to acknowledge the One who was born on Christmas day to be their Saviour who died for them on the cross of Calvary. They love darkness rather than light. To them, Christmas is just another occasion for them to indulge in their own sinfulness and lusts without hope. What a pity! If*

only they will receive Jesus as their Saviour, Christmas will be an entirely different experience for them! Friends, why not come and know Jesus and experience a different Christmas in your lives?

*"As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God".* Christmas is not all lost. There are those who love Him and received Him to be their personal Saviour. To these people, He gives them power to become the sons (and daughters) of God. What good news this is to those who are willing to come to Him even at this Christmas. These are people who know and enjoy the true meaning of Christmas. Are there yet others to be saved? Yes, there are many more. But we, who are saved must go and tell them this good news.

*"Even to them that believe on His Name"* Friends, if you are celebrating Christmas with us, do not just celebrate but come and know more about this Jesus who was born on Christmas day. He is our Lord and Saviour. He can be yours too. He loves you and came to the world on Christmas day to save you. The Bible says that if you believe in Jesus and receive Him as your personal Saviour, you will be saved and will be a son or daughter of our heavenly Father. You will have eternal life and will not come to condemnation. This is the true meaning of Christmas. Why don't you receive Him this Christmas?

**18 Dec 2005**

**“...the joy of the LORD is your strength”  
(Neh 8:10)**

*By Elder Foong Kan Yu*

When I was young, I used to get this constant reply from my mother whenever I complained about being treated unfairly in school. She would always ask me to look at my fingers and be reminded that they are all of different lengths. She wanted to let me know that we are individuals with distinctive differences. We need to put our fingers to use and stop complaining that we should have more thumbs since they are the most useful (fingers are more agile as they have one more joint). So, when I read 1 Corinthians 12, I have a clear understanding what God wants to tell us. On a bigger scale, we know that people from all over the world face calamities. Yet some countries bounced back and got on their feet faster than others. The secret lies in the ability to be resilient and work with a purpose towards the road of recovery. Sadly though in a strong society, it is harder to acknowledge that all these blessings come from God. What a paradox! They should give thanks to God for giving them strength. Societies who are resilient and give due recognition to God's providence will thrive far better.

God teaches us to first seek Him and ask Him for blessings and to give us resilience to be strong. He tells us all the time to be strong. He knows that we are but frail human beings. *"Therefore shall ye keep all the commandments which I command you this day, that ye may be strong, and go in and possess the land, whither ye go to possess it"* (Deut 11:8). *"Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee"* (Deut 31:6). *"Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them"* (Josh 1:6). Notice that both strength and encouragement come from the Lord. We can learn the secrets of Nehemiah and how he led his people through the most difficult time with God-given strength for encouragement.

What did Nehemiah see on returning to Jerusalem? Ruins, ruins and more ruins! He could have gone back to the palace and live happily ever after. He chose instead to live among the ruins with a purpose to rebuild the temple of God. We all know that he gathered a group of downhearted and discouraged people to great heights. He successfully restored the temple to a beautiful place with very limited resources. He did not have material richness. He did not have well trained and skilled people. Management gurus have gleaned lessons from the book of Nehemiah and developed many "Principles to Success". Let us learn the secrets that Nehemiah had.

Secret number one: He sought God first (**pray**). He prayed before he left the comfort of the palace where he worked as a cup bearer. He confessed his sins and acknowledged his short comings. He committed the people and the project (**plan**) to God and asked for directions from Him (**trust**). All that he had he laid before God (**commit**). Surrendering his

will and life, he asked God to use him in whatever way God deems fit. He did not ask for any position (**submit**). This is recorded in Nehemiah chapter one.

Secret number two: Nehemiah left the palace and did not turn back (**steadfast**). He knew that he had to stick to his original purpose and be focused (**serve**). You would have guessed that there were lots of complaints from within — his own people. Obviously after the first euphoria, the people would get tired and would nag. This they did in good measure. Then there were external forces that were waiting to create trouble. They discouraged Nehemiah and his people by rude remarks and aggressions. What was Nehemiah's reaction to these? Again, he prayed and took the necessary action (**faith**). The original purpose was always in his mind.

Secret number three: Nehemiah was always full of joy (**cheerful**) in the Lord despite all the difficulties. I imagine that if he had a black and sad face, his people would be likewise. Who can work with a person who has a discouraged and sad face. Nehemiah had his fair share of troubles and hardship, yet he said *"... the joy of the LORD is your strength"* (Neh 8:10). Jesus himself said, *"These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world"* (Jn 16:33). When we face tribulations and trials, we are to be of good cheer.

Thank God for the wisdom of mothers and thank God for varying lengths of fingers. I cheered up as I look at them. My fingers do not complain but work altogether for the glory of God. Amen!

**25 Dec 2005**

**“ The testimony of Lazarus”  
(John 10)**

*By Su Ching Chun*

**Who was Lazarus?**

There are two Lazarus in the books of the Gospel. The first Lazarus (John 11:1-11) lived in the town of Bethany with his two sisters, Martha and Mary. The second Lazarus (Luke 16: 19-31) was a beggar, full of sores who laid at the gate of a rich man, eating from the crumbs that fell from his table, and dogs came to lick his sores.

**What were their similarities?**

Of course, they were both called Lazarus but their similarities did not stop there. The Bible did not record anything that they had said; most likely they did not say anything at all. However, the testimonies they had shown earned praises from our Lord and they serve as lessons for believers, even today.

**Lazarus' testimony**

Jesus loved the family of Martha, Mary and Lazarus. In the three and a half years of Jesus' ministry, he was taken care of by this family on numerous occasions. The Bible did mention in several portions of the Scriptures the way Martha and Mary served the Lord, but nothing was written about their brother Lazarus. In the third year of Jesus' ministry, he arrived at Bethany again and he heard Martha and Mary telling him "*Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick*" (John 11:3). He whom Jesus lovest? This person whom the Lord loved was Lazarus. But our Lord replied "*This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby*" (John 11:4). Nonetheless, Jesus did not go straight away to visit Lazarus. When Jesus arrived at their house eventually, Lazarus had died and was laid in the grave for four days already. Martha and Mary were in deep grief and although they loved Jesus and knew that that there was nothing Jesus could not accomplish, Mary said to Jesus "*Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.*" When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her, also weeping, He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, and He wept.

Why did Jesus weep? Jesus did not cry because Lazarus was dead. Jesus wept because of the people who were crying, for these people still could not see the fact that Jesus is the Son of God who came to save them! The miracles, healings and preaching in the full three years of Jesus' ministry did not make the people realize the all important fact that their Saviour was right there with them. Thus, our Lord performed yet another miracle, this time He summoned Lazarus out from the grave (John 11:38-41). When the people saw this, many of the Jews believed in Jesus.

In John chapter 12, we see a family worship of giving thanks, a picture of Martha serving, Mary anointing the feet of Jesus, and Lazarus who was raised from the dead, sitting quietly. Lazarus did not say anything but he was a living testimony that led people to believe in Jesus. Indeed, this family had a good testimony for Jesus through their actions and it was more powerful than a thousand words spoken!

### **A believer's testimony**

Today, we can evangelize for the Lord in many ways. We can participate in mission trips, Gospel rallies, tracting, etc. However, do we realize that Jesus loves us as He loved Lazarus? Therefore, if we live like born again Christians, with our actions, speech and values in accordance to what pleases our Lord, we bear powerful testimonies for Christ. We will be like lamps shining for Jesus. This is the Christmas season and we see many people celebrating without understanding the true meaning of Christmas. Therefore, let us bear a living testimony for Jesus and share with them the good news that Jesus is our Saviour and urge them to come quickly to receive the Lord. May our lives shine for Jesus! Amen.

---The End---