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02 Apr 2006

Watch and be Sober

Eld Cheng Wei Nien

Believers in the world today must heed our Lord's warning: "*And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares*" (Lk 21:34). Today, men's hearts are overcharged with worries as well as greed about what to eat, what to drink, how to dress and how to enjoy. They care so much about their physical bodies that they have no time to think about their souls. The world today is full of violence and natural calamities. People are not satisfied with their lives and so they go all out protesting, demonstrating and even carrying out violence and murder. On the other hand, there are people who are so complacent that all they care about is feasting, drinking, dancing and all kinds of immoral indulgences. Why do people behave like this? Because all their hopes are in this world. They know nothing about eternal life, neither do they care about the Second Coming of Christ. Indeed, our Lord's coming will be "*as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth*" (Lk 21:35). Why a snare? Because when the Lord comes, they will be trapped in their own ignorance and sin just like in their sleep, unaware that judgment has come upon them. The apostle Paul has warned us thus, "*For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief*" (1 Thess 5:3-4).

"... we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep..." (1Thess 5:5-6).

Despite the Scripture's frequent warnings and events in the world that tell us that the Coming of the Lord is near, many believers regard this as something irrelevant to their lives, and not worth their taking note of. They are spiritually asleep and are oblivious of things happening around them. Our Lord had given us enough signs about His Second Coming, and many of these are happening right before our eyes, and yet many of us prefer to depart from the truth, eat and drink with the drunkards, walk in the counsel of the ungodly, stand in the way of sinners and sit in the seat of the scornful. Listen to what our Lord says about such a person. "*The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth*" (Matt 24:50,51). Dearly beloved, let us take heed of this warning.

"For they that sleep, sleep in the night" (1Thess 5:7). Sleep is an expression of ignorance and a sign of laziness. Night is in the time of darkness. It reminds us of the end time of the world when sins abound. Believers at this time should be awake rather than asleep. Our Lord, on the night of His betrayal, said to His disciples: "*Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak*" (Matt 26:41). The disciples unfortunately could not keep awake and failed to pray. They fell asleep instead. Believers at this time must watch and pray instead of being lazy and keep on sleeping; lest, when the Lord comes, they be cast away, like the foolish virgins who did not prepare oil for their lamps while waiting for the coming of the bridegroom. The apostle Paul exhorts us: "*See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil*" (Eph 5:15-16).

"and they that be drunken are drunken in the night" (1Thess 5:7). A drunken person is in greater danger than a sleeping person because it is not possible to arouse him. Some believers are so deep in

their drunkenness that it is not possible to pull them back. They are already deeply sunken in the pleasures of the world that no amount of admonition will bring them back. All they care about is to make more money, to enjoy more worldly pleasures and to continue to do what is pleasing to them rather than to God. Such 'believers' do not read God's Word or pray and are very reluctant to serve. Our Lord has a message for such a person: "*Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God*" (Lk 12:20-21).

Let us therefore not sleep or slumber, nor be drunken but be awake and be sober, waiting upon the Lord.

09 Apr 2006

Lessons from Stones and Rocks (Part 2)

Elder Foong Kon Yu

The oldest tree today is probably the one that is located in California. It is an old pine tree estimated to be more than 4,700 years old. Stones are older than that as dry land was created on the third day. Stones are silent witness to all the events since. Though they remain still, we can still learn from them. We are not to worship stones but they serve to jock our memory.

Lesson 4: PROTECTION

What would you do when under attack? Go hide behind a solid place. Solid as a rock, as the saying goes. Stones are a very common and reliable protection barrier. Many strong houses were built with stones for this purpose. These houses last almost forever. When David was running from the pursuit of Saul, he hid in the caves and rocks. When Moses asked the Lord to show Himself, the Lord protected Moses, as a sinful man would not be able come face to face with a perfect God. Exodus 33:22 *"And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by."* The Lord shields us like as a rock would. 2 Samuel 22:3 *"The God of my rock; in him will I trust: he is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge, my saviour; thou savest me from violence."* Psalm 94:22 *"But the LORD is my defence; and my God is the rock of my refuge."* Solid as a rock indeed as the saying goes. Psalm 62:7 *"In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God."* However, be forewarned that when the Lord comes again to judge, those who do not have the rock would be seeking shelter under one. They would not find peace. They rejected the corner stone. It would be too late. Mark 12:10 *"And have ye not read this scripture; The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner:"* 1 Peter 2:6 *"Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded."*

Lesson 5: GUIDANCE

I have heard the story of how a smart boy and his sister placed stones in the forest as they were being led away to be sold. The stones later served as markers for them to find their way back home. The Lord is likened to rocks which are always there for us. He is never far. He guides us if we ask Him to. He leads us like the stone markers laid by the boy. Why does God want to do this? There is only one reason. He loves us for His name's sake, for the glory of Christ. Psalm 31:2-3 *"Bow down thine ear to me; deliver me speedily: be thou my strong rock, for an house of defence to save me. For thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore for thy name's sake lead me, and guide me."* God led the Israelites out of Egypt. He was with them day and night. He delivered them out of danger. Today we have the same God who is with us day and night. He is able to lead us out of danger and guide us too. He is doing that every moment. Yes, the Rock remains unchanged.

Lesson 6: REMEMBRANCE

When the Israelites came to another water obstacle, God reminded Joshua that as He was with Moses in crossing the Red Sea, He will also be with Joshua and the Israelites. Did we not learn that God is with us each moment? God stopped the flow of water so that Joshua and the people could cross over to the other side of Jordan. As soon as the soles of the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant touched the waters, the river bed became dry land! The children crossed over with ease. Joshua then instructed the people to place twelve stones as remembrance so that future generations will remember that the Lord delivered them through the River Jordan. Joshua 4:9 "*And Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests which bare the ark of the covenant stood: and they are there unto this day.*" I have learnt that when we drink water, remember the source. This is important and we are to tell our children (and others) how gracious the Lord has been to us.

When the Philistines took the Ark, the Israelites were desperate. They thought that it was the end of the world. Surely, they would be doomed! They forgot that the Lord is not a God of materials or anything (including the Ark). They perceived that God deserted them because of the Ark that they defended so strongly had been captured. 1 Samuel 7:2-4 "*And it came to pass, while the ark abode in Kirjathjearim, that the time was long; for it was twenty years: and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD. And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the LORD with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the LORD, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.*" 1 Samuel 7:4 "*Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the LORD only.*" This is all that matters. Serve the LORD only! Samuel called that place Ebenezer. He set a stone there so that we will remember where our help comes from. 1 Samuel 7:12 "*.... Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the LORD helped us.*"

16 Apr 2006
He is Risen (Luke 24:1-2)
Rev Ton Soung Kao

1. "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" (v. 5)

The human body deteriorates with age and the functions of the organs lose their efficiency as the days go by. The outer appearance also becomes older as the skin wrinkles, muscles lose their firmness, hair turns grey and drops. One's stamina, eyesight and memory also become poorer with illness, and diseases abound. Indeed, everyone is afraid of growing old and eventually dying. But no one can escape certain death one day. While many had tried to search for an elixir for longevity since the ancient times, it remains a futile effort.

Recently, there were some scientific claims that certain drugs can delay aging and also restore youthfulness. It was claimed that the reason the human body deteriorates is due to the reduced efficiency for the body to regulate hormonal changes. Therefore, they claimed to invent some medication that if taken regularly according to their recommended dosage, the user is able to increase metabolism rate, restore organ functions, youthfulness and overall vitality. Expectedly, sales of the medicine have been rather brisk with such wonderful claims.

2. "He is not here, but is risen" (v. 6)

Can human beings really fight natural aging and extend their lives forever? No! Jesus clearly told us: "*Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?*" (Matt 6:27). Even with modern technology and medical advances, the Bible tells us that the length of our lives are "*threescore years and ten*" or "*by reason of strength they be fourscore years*" (Ps 90:10). "*And as it is appointed unto men once to die*" (Heb 9:27). We all die "*for all have sinned*" (Rom 3:23) and "*for the wages of sin is death*" (Rom 6:23).

As such, should we not despair because of certain death one day? No! Two thousand years ago, the angel told the women who came to visit the grave of Jesus saying, "*He is not here, but is risen*". Jesus came to die for us, for He loved us so "*that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage*" (Heb 2:14-15). Now, with victory over death by our Lord, we can proclaim "*O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?*" (1 Cor 15:55). Believe in Jesus and we shall never fear death anymore because we shall "*not perish, but have everlasting life*" (Jn 3:16). Also, "*though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day*" (2 Cor 4:16). Finally, when our Lord Jesus comes the second time, we shall all receive a glorified body.

Dear friends, hesitate no more! This is the great gift of salvation from Christ, why reject it?

Dear brethren, be joyful as you have already received the gift but do not be selfish. Go, share the Gospel with others!

23 Apr 2006
True Worship
Pr Yang De Gang

"But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23-24).

When we read about the testimonies of how some great spiritual people were transformed from that of a sinner to God's mighty servant, we can only gasp at the power of God's salvation. These faithful servants left behind great examples of true faith and service for us to emulate. Hudson Taylor once said, "God wants people who can exhibit His greatness through their lives". How can one do that? Only through a believer who truly worships God. John 4: 23-24 gives us some insights on how to do so.

1. Worship God in spirit. The book of Revelation describes the worship of God with eight times of "Amen". This shows that when we truly worship God, we worship with our spirit and the bottom of our hearts say "Amen" to the power and glory of God. Since we worship God in spirit, our hearts must be full of joy. We all know how Paul and Silas were beaten and put in prison when they were at Philippi. Instead of getting demoralized, Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God in prison. These were true praises from the bottom of their hearts! When we worship God in spirit, our hearts are contented. In Luke 15, we know the prodigal son wandered around, seeking to fill his heart with worldly pleasures. However, we know that he was only truly contented and fulfilled when he returned to his father's house.

2. Worship God in truth. When we worship God in truth and in all honesty, we seek to lead a life of righteousness and godly living. We must recognize that the person we worship affects and steers our values in life. Some people worship the god of fortune, and they naturally place money above everything else. If a person worships God, he naturally seeks the way of the truth. How can we worship God in truth? First of all, we need to place God above all. To worship is to place the person above everything. Then, we obey him and let him govern us. If we place our lives in the hands of God, we will be guided and we will not wander into the wrong path. John 7:18 also tells us to "*seeketh his glory*" so that "*whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*" (1 Cor 10:31). Indeed, this should be the highest aim of our spiritual lives and God truly deserves to be glorified. A person who truly loves God worships Him; and a person who truly worships God glorifies Him. Glorifying God therefore becomes a part of the life of the true worshipper. True worshipping is not only a matter of attending the Sunday Worship Service every week but it is a life long quest to glorify God in all that we do. Therefore, let us place God above everything and we shall be uplifted in the spirit. This is true worship. Amen!

30 Apr 2006
I Remember Easter
Elder Cheng Wei Nien

Good Friday is over, so is Easter. We thank God for a good turn up for both Good Friday and Easter Sunday Services. The Sunrise service was specially blessed with a beautiful morning at Jurong Hilltop. Those who have not attended any of these have missed some of the most blessed events of the year. For those of us who have been saved by the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, Good Friday's Lord's Supper and Easter Sunrise Service must be the most memorable events of our lives. Of all the messages I have heard on Easter, the best was the one preached by our Lord Himself, to the disciples, on the very first night after His resurrection. This was what He said: "... *Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you*" (Jn 20:21).

"Peace be unto you". I remember that since the day I was saved and knew my risen Saviour, I have peace in my heart. Our Lord came to the world to bring peace; not as the world gives us, but as He gives (Jn 14:27). Every believer has his or her fair share of problems and burdens in this world but the resurrection of our Lord gives us power to overcome all these worldly problems. He told us "... *be of good cheer; I have overcome the world*" (Jn 16:33). He also called us, especially me, to "*come unto me (Jesus), all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*" (Matt 11:28). The most precious thing as a child of God is that, not only have I everlasting life, but also peace while I am still on earth.

"As my Father hath sent me". I remember that God sent His Son to this world to die for me and to be the propitiation for my sins (1 Jn 2:2). He came and faithfully and painfully fulfilled this great commission on the cross and died for me so that all my sins are forgiven, and believing in Him, I have everlasting life. After three days, God raised Him from death and gave Him a name which is above every name (Phil 2:9). He is now with the Father in heaven but will come back one day to receive me unto Himself, and I will forever be with Him (Jn 14:3). This must be the most wonderful message Easter has ever brought to me, and to all those who believe in Him.

"Even so send I you". I remember that my Lord has not only died for my sins, He also sent me to be His messenger to many lost souls "*to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins...*" (Acts 26:18). Have I honestly done so in obeying His commandment to reach out to the lost? Yes I have, but shamefully I must admit, not to the best of my ability. May the Lord help me!

"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom 10:13). The Easter message to the world is: "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house*" (Acts 16:31). The Easter message to us believers is: "*Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned*" (Mk 16:15-16). We see how vitally important these Easter messages are to the saved as well as to the unsaved! But "*how then shall they*

call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" (Rom 10:14-15). This is what I remember about Easter, and I hope is what you remember too.

07 May 06

Be not Drunk with wine (Eph 5:18)

Elder Chong Tau Sheng

I have heard of many incidences where people got themselves into trouble after having one drink too many. And there were also instances where acquaintances were killed in drink driving road accidents, and some have even died from liver diseases from alcoholism.

A well known researcher once said that one in two medical patients in US has mental illness, of which a large proportion of the cause was due to alcohol abuse. Former British Prime Minister Lloyd George said that the British people drank far too much for their own good, such that alcohol was a worse enemy than the Germans. Indeed, alcohol has caused too many happy families to be broken, turned too many good people into crooks, polluted too many innocent hearts, destroyed far too many promising lives and bred much evil.

In the Bible, we read of the dangers of alcohol abuse since the time of Noah (Gen 9:20-21). In the Old Testament, there were many uses for wine, one of which was for offering (Exo 29:40, Lev 23:13, 1 Sam 1:24). Wine was also used as medication in some cases (2 Sam 16:2, Prov 31:6). In the New Testament, Timothy was told to take some wine as medication for his weak stomach (1 Tim 5:23). Paul, however, reminded people to be "*not drunk with wine*" (Eph 5:18). With medical advance, modern medicine has replaced wine as a more effective cure for weak stomach and so the use of wine is no longer needed for such ailments.

In recent times, the economy has seen great progress and lives have become very affluent. This also led to a social and economic boom in the consumption of alcohol. As Christians, we are also exposed to such temptations but we need to escape from it. We have the word of God to help us. The prophet Isaiah reprimanded the people who abused wine as sinners (Isa 28:1-8). In other portions of the scriptures, strong words were used on those people who got themselves drunk from alcohol (Prov 20:1, 21:17, 23:20-21; Eph 5:18; 1 Pet 4:3). Church leaders must also be careful in the use of alcohol (1 Tim 3:3, Tit 1:7).

The Apostle Paul also encouraged us to forgo any actions that may stumble our brethren. "*It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak*" (Rom 14:21).

14 May 06

Honour thy father and thy mother (Exodus 20:12)

Elder Foong Kon Yu

During the last campaign of the General Election in Singapore, a very prominent politician referred to his party as the "Mother of Singapore". He recited the well known Chinese nursery rhyme that the best person in the world is mother (世上只有妈妈好 / shi shang zhi you mama hao). This message touched the heart of the listener as we have very fond memories of our mothers. A very clever, emotional appeal! Though we have forgotten our mothers recall that biologically we were all once a part of her being as we were once inside her body physically. It is tough carrying the extra load but she counts it a joy to bear the burden that makes her lop-sided and causes her to be very careful to strike a balance just to walk.

Contrary to some cultural teachings, Christians are thought to have forgotten their mothers, as they do not worship them (after they have died). The Bible tells us consistently to observe the Ten Commandments. God has given the first four commandments in relation between man and God, and another six on relationship between man and man, the first of which is: "*Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee*" (Exodus 20:12). God reminds us again in Matthew 19:19 "*Honour thy father and thy mother...*" We are not to worship our parents but to honour them. After death we are sure that there are only two destinations. It is such a blessing to have received Christ through the witnessing of the mother. For those who received Christ before their mothers, it is our duty to witness to them that we may be united in prayer and that we shall meet each other in heaven. There is no need to worship anyone but the God who created us and gave us salvation to be in heaven one day.

Mother would make sacrifices so that we have comfort. They would go to great lengths to fulfill our demands. She would do whatever she can within her means to ensure we are comfortable. Then she teaches us to be independent. When we are independent, we become "free". It pains the heart of mother to discipline the child but she has to do it for the sake of making us learn. It is with very sweet sadness that she lets us go our way. She misses us and yet knows that we have grown up. The eagles build their nest by first placing very rough branches followed by finer twigs and finally overlaid with feathers shed by the mother eagle. This will ensure that the newly hatched eaglets would have a very comfortable resting place, as their skins are tender. As they grow, the parents will peel off the feathers followed by the twigs. The rough coarse texture of the bigger branches will cause the eaglets to be very uncomfortable. Soon it becomes unbearable for them and they take their first flight. Thus, they become independent. Even though the eaglets have full faculties to fly, the mother bird tags alongside to make sure the maiden flight is done safely. The eagle is but a wild bird yet it has a lesson for us. The eaglets are fed by their mother without condition of repayment. Our human mothers are far better in that they provide much more than the eagles. She also has a longer period to keep her busy before we are independent. There is no condition of repayment for her sacrifices. The same jaws of the crocodile that are capable of crushing a thick chunk of bone is able also to hold her young gently. Such is the love of a mother. God created all these as object lessons that we may learn.

In reflection, our duty then is to love our mothers with a heart of gratitude. Mother's Day is but just a day to remember her. We should love our mothers and express that everyday. While we find it hard to understand mother's love, we would even find it harder to fathom God's love. He loves us far beyond our mothers. Our mothers love us and some mothers may even die for their children but she cannot do anything if her child dies. On the hand, God loves us so much that He sent the Lord Jesus to die in our stead. He redeemed us and yet we oftentimes reject and take that sacrifice for granted. Thank God for an understanding heart to comprehend the salvation plan. It should then be out of love that we tell others about God's salvation plan. Thank God for being the originator of love.

21 May 06
North Thailand Missions
Elder Mak Kam Wak

"I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4).

In the past, I relied on the reports and slide shows given by mission teams when they returned from north Thailand, to catch up with the progress of things there. However, the understanding of the work there remained rather vague because it is difficult to visualize the situation without actually being there. Thank God for the opportunity that I was able to participate first hand in the mission field in recent times, and after a couple of visits, I had a clear idea of the state of things up in north Thailand.

Many people wonder: What good can a few days spent in the field make? After all, once the team is back, the work in north Thailand continues as before, is it not? Nevertheless, the Bible clearly tells us to work while we still can (John 9:4), and therefore we have to work faithfully and trust that in God's own time we shall see the fruits.

One pastor said this of short mission trips: mission trips enable one to widen his vision, increase one's faith, deepen one's love and it is a turning point in one's life. As I ponder over his words, I felt the same as I have indeed learnt and benefited much from the trips.

Our Church started the work in the mountainous area of north Thailand in 1991. In places like Maepen, Parliang and Tangwo, the standard of living is difficult and there are no modern amenities. During the rainy seasons, the roads turn muddy and with the steep cliffs on the sides of the roads, travelling becomes rather dangerous. Also, the water sources are not purified and drinking water had to be purchased. The people are mainly farmers who toiled in the fields most of the day and only come to worship on Sunday. This is one of the reasons mission trips are important so as to visit them, encourage them and help their spiritual lives grow.

Over in Maepen, the worshippers are mainly descendents of the Taiwanese KMT soldiers and some of the tribal people who reside in the area. After Xiong Fu Man left late last year, Pr Yang Jia Wang took over but he spoke mainly Thai. As some of the people cannot fully understand Thai, the messages were sometimes not very effective. Thus, they are praying for a Mandarin-speaking pastor to minister to them.

"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal 6:2). We dwell in the modern city of Singapore and are blessed with the ease to receive all the lessons we need to grow in the spirit. This is not so for the people in North Thailand. They are not as privileged as we are in terms of receiving training in the Word of God. The work in north Thailand needs support and the spiritual needs of the brethren require strengthening. Mr Yang Degang will be leading a team in June to minister to the people there. We pray that you remember us in your prayers and support us. If you have the burden, do join us! We are all fond of taking holiday trips once in a while. Maybe you can consider using your vacation and

do something to help in extending the Gospel. We will be very glad if anyone wishes to join us. " *Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord'* (1 Cor 15:58).

28 May 06
True Service
Mr Yang De Gang

"He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him" (John 7:18).

In 1949, a Japanese preacher was invited to speak in a certain chapel in Edinburgh, England. Many came to listen to the message as this preacher was one who ministered to the poor and homeless in the slums of Tokyo where he even stayed with them. One of the destitutes in the slum had a rare disorder in which he had to hold the hand of another person at night in order to be able to fall asleep. So this preacher allowed the person to hold his hand every night for six months until he recovered. Also, during the Japanese invasion of China, this preacher was the only person who stood against the actions of the imperial army but he was expectedly sent to jail. As such, the English were all eager to listen to his preaching. What can we learn from this man's faithful service unto God? What are the conditions that make our service acceptable before Him?

1. The Starting Point: Be sent by God. The starting point in our service is very important. Remember when Jesus appeared before the disciples and gave them the *Great Commission*, they were frightened and very afraid that the Jews would come after them and kill them. But when Jesus said, *"Peace be unto you"* and showed them His palms bearing the prints of the nails, the disciples truly rejoiced. They realized that the Lord had risen and conquered death. With this renewed faith, they were able to accomplish their mission. So dear brethren, if we want to serve the Lord, we must first have the same conviction that our risen Lord is always with us. This is the starting point.

2. The Motive: Love. When Jesus showed the disciples His palms with the prints of the nails, they were truly moved by the greatness of the love of Christ. *"For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again!"* (2 Cor 5:14-15).

3. The Power: Holy Spirit. There was a lady missionary in England's history who accomplished much for the Lord and many were inspired by her service. Few people knew that she was once a shy girl, only to be transformed into a person of strong will when the Holy Spirit gave the power to serve. She went far into Africa and became a role model for aspiring missionaries. When we serve the Lord, we serve with the power given by the Holy Spirit.

4. The Objective: Be like Jesus. Jesus said *"...as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you"* (Jn 20:21). Our Lord Jesus is always our role model as He accomplished what God the Father had sent Him to do on earth. Likewise, we are charged with the mission to spread the Gospel. Can we endeavour also to accomplish what Jesus had commissioned us to do? Pray that we all follow in His footsteps!

A believer who holds his position steadfastly can serve the Lord effectively. The path of the Lord is also our path. As we follow Jesus closely, we shall bear fruits for Him. Grab hold of your chance to serve for the rewards of true service shall last forever. Are you willing? I pray that we are all able to say, "Lord, send me". Amen!

04 June 06

Let us run with Patience

Elder Cheng Wei Nien

In a week's time, we will be on our way to the Bible camp. Most of us must be feeling excited and are looking forward to experiencing another wonderful time together hearing the word of God expounded to us. A Christian's life must not be on a stand still. It must be on the move all the time, not aimlessly but "*run with patience the race that is set before us*" (Heb 12:1). The purpose of the Bible camp is to help us, believers, to run our heavenly race, "*looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith*" (Heb 12:2). Sometimes we see believers who are either not running at all or running in the wrong direction. Instead of pressing towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, they are running towards the world and all its pleasures and attractions. For those who are going to the camp, hopefully the messages and the time spent in prayer will bring us back on track once again for the Lord. Lukewarmness should never be in the life of believers, like the Church of Laodicea, to whom our Lord said: "*I will spue thee out of my mouth*" (Rev 3:16). Why was the church of Laodicea "*neither cold nor hot*"? There were a few reasons:

SELF-COMPLACENCY

The believers of the church of Laodicea were very complacent. They said to themselves: "*I am rich, and increased with goods*" (Rev 3:17). Indeed, the Laodicean Christians were rich and very self contented. However, their richness took them away from serving the Lord. Today, some of our brethren might have the same attitude. Their own businesses are doing well and materially they are blessed. They are therefore so busy with their own work and enjoyment that they have little time for the Lord. They feel that coming to church and sitting through the service should be enough for them. They do not see the need to serve the Lord other than coming to worship services. In fact, they are running the race in the wrong direction, running towards the world rather than to God. Hopefully, the Bible camp will put them back on track serving the Lord.

SELF-SUFFICIENCY

"*I have need of nothing*" said some other believers. "I have been a Christian for many years and I have been coming regularly to Sunday worship services. I give my tithes and I think I know enough about the Bible. I do not think I need anything more". It is a dangerous thing for believers to think that they "*have need of nothing*". Such believers are so self-sufficient that they do not feel the need of coming to the Lord in prayer, nor to depend on His mercy. They have no patience to run the race and have, in fact, stopped running altogether. It is in Bible camp when we take time to reflect on ourselves that we find how inadequate we are before God. So let us come to the camp not just for a time of relaxation and enjoyment but also with our hearts prepared to hear and meditate on the Word of God.

SELF-DELUSION

"Knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev 3:17). Often, we do not realize how pitiful the state of our spiritual life is, until we come to the Lord in prayer and study His word seriously. Bible camp is the time we can put away our worldly worries and distractions so that we can have time to reflect on the state of our own spiritual life. Let us therefore not deceive ourselves thinking that, by sitting back, we are doing well, when we ought to be running with patience the race that is set before us.

SELF-AWARENESS

We need be aware that we are being left behind in our race. Often we think that we are rich but actually we are spiritually poor; we think that we are knowledgeable but we are spiritually blind; we think that we are well clad but we are actually spiritually naked. We need to come to the Lord who said: *"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent"* (Rev 3:19). Hopefully, the Bible camp can help us realize how much we are lacking in our commitments to Christ, and encourage us to be more zealous in serving Him. Amen!

11 June 06

God, Where are you?

Elder Foong Kon Yu

Our prayers appear to be unanswered sometimes and we search for solutions somewhere else. We ask "God, where are you?" He is always there but we have misbehaved, that's why we seem to be deserted. In the secular world, there is a saying, "If you cannot find the fault anywhere else, the culprit must be you". Well, we live by what the Scripture says. Is our Bible not filled with many verses that ask us to examine ourselves? *"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me"* (Ps 66:18).

Now in the book of Malachi (chapter 2), the prophet dealt with the leaders first and they were told to set a good example first. They should not be serving for their own stomachs. Then he turned to the people, yes to folks like you and me. We are warned that the Lord will reject our offerings and will not hear our prayers. We may weep before the Lord but He will not condone a double standard in our behaviour. We cannot come to God with a different personality from that of our every day dealings with our brethren.

We have to be gracious to others if we want God to deal with us with grace. *"Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers?"* (Mal 2:10). Each claims that we worship God; yes, as brethren we worship the same God whom we call Abba, Father. He is our Creator. Why then do we deal treacherously with another person who is also created by God and has the same Father? What then is treachery? Our dictionary says it is "willful betrayal of fidelity, confidence, or trust; perfidy". It means we first betray ourselves. We want to be right with God but we are not right with our fellow brethren. We also betray the trust of those around us. Granted there are some unsaved people we distrust; however, it would be sad if we distrust those saved people whom we meet so very often. Yet in our church we would not trust some people because we have lost our confidence in them. What is the church made up of? Believers. Each one of us represents the church and Jesus Christ, our Saviour. It is our duty to follow the commandments of our Lord and let the light of Jesus shine through us. Even non-believers look at us with higher expectations. The reason they do so is that we have declared to the world that there is a certain standard for us to follow.

We like to judge our friends and gossip about their behaviour. We cannot accept certain ways of doing things and we gossip and pass comments with twisted and slanted flavours to give the impression that we are right. It is natural that we protect our turf and have others know that we have our own standards that we perceive as being right. However, we are only right in our own eyes. *"Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts"* (Prov 21:2). Deviation from our concept of what is right is considered an error. We judge using ourselves as the "gold standard". In the industry, the sample that is "perfect" is called the "gold sample" and comparisons will be made. This sample is well guarded and used as a standard for acceptance. We may even get angry with someone because he has "offended" us due to the way he behaves. The "offender" may not even know what wrong he has done! Remember we are all sinners, saved by grace. We are no "gold

standard". Sad ending awaits such a situation. First, the other person has a standard of measurement too. Lest we sin further note that scripturally it is only correct that we let the erring party know their fault and in what ways we are offended. Tell it to the person directly and make reconciliation. Pray for the person. *"Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?"* (Matt 7:1-4).

You would like God to hear your prayers; here is a secret from our very own Bible. *"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much"* (Jas 5:16). It is sinful to disobey Scripture. Let's pray that when we come before the Lord daily we echo the words of the Psalmist: *"Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin"* (Ps 51:2). Amen!

18 June 06
Forgiveness
Elder Su Ching Chun

The Lord's teaching on forgiveness: "*For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses*" (Matt 6:14-15).

In the three and a half years of Jesus' ministry on earth, He left us with many lessons, of which, the lesson on forgiveness occupied a fairly large portion of His teachings. Our Lord knew that humans are proud and selfish, easy on ourselves but tough on others, not mindful of people's needs but always taking good care of our own needs. We always come before God to ask for forgiveness on things we have done wrong, but what happens when a brother trespassed against us? We keep score, get angry and do not want to forgive him. Indeed, Jesus knew our weaknesses and hence the teaching on forgiveness becomes almost conditional: If you want to be forgiven by God, forgive your brethren! "*And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you*" (Eph 4:32).

When Joseph was sold by his brothers, he forgave them. When Joseph's brothers came to Egypt much later due to famine, he not only forgave them but also showed them tremendous kindness. Joseph arranged for the entire family to come and stay with him in Egypt for he realized that it was God's providence for him to be sold to Egypt so that his family can be saved later. What a lesson of forgiveness we can draw from Joseph!

Another example we can cite is that of Philemon forgiving Onesimus who stole from him. It was a voluntary forgiveness on the part of Philemon out of love for his brethren. This demonstrates the love of God through Christ who enables us to show our brethren love, and turn hate into love. "*For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?*" (Matt 5:46-47).

The apostle's teaching on forgiveness: "*For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me*" (Rom 7:18-20). Indeed, humans practise protectionism, taking care of one's benefits, privacy, freedom and properties. We operate with a protection net, very afraid to be taken advantage of. We mean not what we say and do not treat each other with honesty. It is very sad for true friendship seldom exists.

However, we are all born again believers of Christ, so we have to pray that the Holy Spirit will move us greatly that we may live amicably with our brethren. Let us forgive and forget, humble ourselves and not provoke others for we are all one in Christ. Let us also pray for one another and also for a compassionate heart. This way, we shall be truly free and have a blessed life.

25 June 06
The Consecrated Life
Mr Yang De Gang

"But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Pet 1:15-16)

Holiness is God's character and leading a consecrated life is a physical manifestation of a born again believer. In the Scriptures, the word "holy" is mentioned 61 times, "disciples" 84 times, "Christians" 3 times and "believers" 4 times. Evidently, a true believer does not merely "believe" but he lives it out by leading a holy life. In this respect, we shall study the various aspects that constitute a holy life.

1. Sensitivity to Sin. In our daily lives, we are surrounded by people, things and happenings. In such a situation, either we follow the tide or we press on in the opposite direction. But in order not to be swept by the tide, we need to be sensitive to sin and be vigilant. Dr John Sung made a testimony once about his experience when he felt distant from God during one of his prayers. Later, he realized his problem. He stole \$19. When he travelled by boat at one time, his church in Shanghai paid for his fare which was \$19. When he reached his destination, the other side again gave him \$19 for the fare which Dr Sung accepted. Of course, later Dr Sung returned the fare after realizing his mistake. Although a fairly minor thing, such was the sensitivity of sin we ought to have!

2. Say 'No' to Sin. The Christian Campus Fellowship in Oxford University had 4 criteria for its members. One: honesty; Two: purity; Three: selflessness; Four: love. With these four conditions, believers "measured" themselves daily and endeavoured to lead a consecrated life. In a similar way, say 'no' to all the temptations and sinful things that bombard us daily. We may appear impractical folks to many but we answer to God, not men.

3. Do Not Cover Up Sin. *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 Jn 1:9). If our results after exams are less than satisfactory, admit that we have not worked hard enough, not because the teacher could not teach or the examiners were unfair. If we had judged others, do not excuse ourselves saying it was a discussion. Pride is not a way of showing confidence. Pornography is not art. Being irresponsible is not humility. Let's face it, we must not cover up sin with excuses!

4. Do Not Go Near Sin. It was once said, "If you do not wish to have business with Satan, do not visit his shop". In north eastern China, there is a kind of leopard which has snowy white fur. It's a very fast animal and the hunting dogs could not catch up with it, so the hunters had problems shooting it. But the leopard hated getting its fur dirty so the hunters placed filth around its hole after the leopard came out of it. Upon discovering the filth, the leopard would refuse to return to its hole and hence the hunters have a chance to shoot it. A lesson for us who endeavour to lead a sanctified life!

All believers need to have a Quiet Time when we confess our sins. We need to acknowledge our weaknesses and pray that God will forgive us and grant us the strength to overcome sins

---The End---