

Your Word is a Light to My Path

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Introduction

The following is a series of Bible studies on important Christian doctrines. The faith of all Christians should be firmly anchored in these truths, to enable us to be faithful followers of the Lord Jesus and effectively execute our commission which is to be His witnesses. The only source used in this study is the Bible, as you must “know the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15). The Lord Himself wishes to instruct you through His Word, as “all Scripture *is* given by the inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Bible study should be done in a devout and prayerful way, always mindful of the fact that the Holy Spirit wants to convince you of these great truths. He is the Spirit of truth who will guide you in such a way that the Lord Jesus will be glorified and His promises and redemptive work will be clearly understood (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-14). Your study must not only be an academic exercise but also a spiritual experience which will enlighten the eyes of your mind. Knowledge and grace should go hand in hand, as we must “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18).

In this Bible study, with the exception of certain key verses, we use Scripture references without quoting them. The intention is that every person should find and read the Scriptures in the context in which they are written. It is important that you read these verses, as you will become more acquainted with the Bible and also be motivated to further study. In the process, the knowledge of each subject can be expanded. Notes and reference verses can be added at the end of each chapter so please feel free to notify us of your findings, as these may help us in future revisions of this study guide.

We have added a number of key questions to every chapter to assist you in testing your knowledge on a particular subject. Those who wish to respond to the questions in writing, or who may have other questions on the content of the Bible study, may direct them to Marius and Madelein Wolfaardt at info@jam.org.za

During the course of your Bible study you can use the opportunity to underline and memorise key verses in Scripture. There are so many promises, instructions, warnings and exhortations in the Bible of which we should take note that it warrants and necessitates an intensive study of God's Word. But one should guard against only accumulating knowledge in your mind, as that on its own, will not build you up or enrich you spiritually. After reading and memorising a portion of Scripture you must meditate on it and take it to heart, i.e. you should accept it in faith. Only then will you be able to say: “Your word have I hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You. Blessed are *You*, O LORD! Teach me Your statutes” (Ps. 119:11-12).

It is imperative that we approach this Bible study with an open and receptive mind. We all have much to learn from the Word of God, but for that purpose we need to have a teachable spirit. If you cling to preconceived ideas and church dogma, you will have adopted a biased approach even before you have started with the study. People who are disposed in this way only read the Bible to find confirmation for their own ideas, and then ignore, spiritualise or reinterpret everything that is in conflict with their views. In doing so, the Bible is abused to give credibility to theological traditions and the commandments of men (Matt. 15:8-9). That will not bring you closer to the truth but rather let you deviate from it even further.

The aim of every believer should be, to be spiritually strong “till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with

every wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4:13-14). Satan intends to keep us away from the Bible and the correct interpretation of it and to expose us to wrong teachings which have been devised to corrupt our minds from the simplicity that is in Christ (2 Cor. 11:3-4). We must guard against that possibility.

Our great objective should be to stand before the Lord one day, hearing these words of approval from Him: “You have kept my word, and have not denied my name” (Rev. 3:8). To keep the Word of God means to know and obey it as the inerrant Word of the living God. By honouring the name of Jesus we are committed to believe in His divine attributes and to confess His deity and saving grace based upon His atoning work on the cross. May the Lord enable every devout student of the Bible to achieve a higher level of dedication to Him and His Word.

1. The Triune God

The God of the Bible is the Triune God – God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. They co-exist from all eternity (Rev. 1:8). as the Father created the world through the Son (Heb. 1:2; John 1:3; Rev. 4:11). John describes the pre-incarnate Son as the Word (Gr. Logos) who existed from the beginning (John 1:1). He was not only with God but He Himself was God. The third Person is the “eternal Spirit” (Heb. 9:14) who, as God, also has an eternal self-existence.

The three Persons in the Godhead are described as follows by John: “For there are three who bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one” (1 John 5:7). All three Persons can be described and addressed as Lord (Heb. Yahweh; Gr. Kurios) and God (Heb. Elohim; Gr. Theos). Paul addressed Jesus on the road to Damascus as Lord (Acts 9:5) and also referred to Him as God (Rom. 9:5).

The first name used for God in the Bible is Elohim. In the Hebrew language, this word is used both in its singular and plural form, and therefore indicates that the Godhead is plural and yet forms a composite unity. It is three Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who, together, constitute one, eternal God. This concept is clearly evident from the personal pronouns used for God, who said regarding the creation of humans: “Let *Us* make man in *Our* image, after *Our* likeness... So God created man in *His own* image, in the image of God created *He* him; male and female created *He* them” (Gen. 1:26-27). The Triune God can indeed say: “Let *Us* make man,” and then, “...male and female created *He* them.”

The fact of the eternal deity and self-existence of the Lord Jesus is denied in a well-known Christian confession of faith: “I believe in God the Father, the Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ His only-begotten Son...” The impression is hereby created that God the Father was alone when He created the world, and that Jesus was only begotten and born much later “as man.” Consider this wrong impression in the light of the following Scriptures: Heb. 1:1-2, John 1:1-3,10,14, 1 Cor. 8:6, Eph. 3:9 and Col. 1:16-17.

God as Creator

In the beginning of the Old Testament the Triune God (Heb. Elohim) revealed Himself as the Creator of everything that exists (Gen. 1:1–2:3).

God has creative power in Himself. By only speaking a word He called everything into existence (Ps. 33:6; Heb. 11:3; 2 Pet. 3:5). In Gen. 1 we often read: “Then God said...” There is also a dynamic power in the word of the gospel to recreate our lives (Rom. 1:16).

The original creation (Gen. 1:1-2) ended in a situation in which the earth was without form, void and covered in darkness. But the Lord did not create the world in vain, to be uninhabited (Isa. 45:18). It is evident that some catastrophe of a great magnitude occurred on earth. The only biblical explanation for this is the fall of Lucifer from heaven (Isa. 14:12-17; Ezek. 28:12-17; Rev. 12:3-4). This resulted in the earth being without form and void for an unspecified time.

During the subsequent creative works of the Lord He restored order to the already existing matter and made all forms of life (plants, animals and man) "according to its kind." Man is not part of the natural creation, but unique in the sense that man was created in the image and likeness of God and assigned to have dominion over the natural creation (Gen. 1:3-31; Ps. 8:4-9).

All creation testifies to the fact that there is an intelligent Creator who made everything (Ps. 19:2; Isa. 37:16). His eternal power and Godhead are evident from the works of His hands (Rom. 1:20). It is impossible that there could have been an orderly creation without God.

Through the theory of evolution God is denied as Creator by ascribing the existence of man to an evolutionary line of development through the animal kingdom (Rom. 1:23). People who believe this lie become futile in their thoughts and foolish in their hearts (Rom. 1:21-22). The foolishness of the rejection of God as Creator can also give rise to atheism, and such people have no absolute religious or moral norms in their lives (Ps. 14:1).

Names of God

God (Heb. Elohim, or in shortened form El; Gr. Theos) – Gen. 1:1; 17:1; Rom. 1:1.

LORD (OT) and Lord (NT) (Heb. Yahweh; Gr. Kurios) – Gen. 4:1; Matt. 1:20. The name Yahweh is often linked to certain verbs or nouns to emphasise the attributes of God, for example, Yahweh-jireh (the LORD will provide), Yahweh-nissi (the LORD is my banner) and Yahweh-shalom (the LORD is peace).

Lord (Heb. Adonai; Gr. Kurios) – Gen. 18:27; 2 Pet. 2:9.

Lord LORD (Heb. Adonai Yahweh) – Gen. 15:2.

LORD [your] God (Heb. Yahweh Elohim; Gr. Kurios Theos) – Ex. 20:2; Matt. 22:37.

I AM – Ex. 3:14; John 8:58.

God Almighty (Heb. El-Shaddai; Gr. Theos Pantokrator) – Gen. 17:1; Rev. 16:14.

Everlasting God – Gen. 21:33.

Eternal God – Deut. 33:27.

Living God – Jos. 3:10.

Most high God, the Possessor of heaven and earth – Gen. 14:22.

God of heaven – Jonah 1:9.

God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – Ex. 3:6; Acts 3:13.

Holy One of Israel – Isa. 43:3.

Lord of hosts – Isa. 1:24.

King eternal, immortal, invisible, the God who alone is wise – 1 Tim. 1:17.

Only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords – 1 Tim. 6:15.

Yahweh and Adonai

In the original Hebrew text of the OT, consisting only of consonants without any vowels, Yahweh is written as YHWH and for a long time wrongly pronounced as “Jehovah.” The correct pronunciation is “Yahweh.” In a literal observance of the third commandment (“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain”) orthodox Jews mostly use the name Adonai. When the temple service was still practised, only the High Priest used the name Yahweh once a year when he entered the Most Holy on the Day of Atonement to offer a blood sacrifice for the sins of Israel. However, the name of the Lord (Yahweh) is not profaned when reverently used in conversations, sermons and prayers. The profaning of His Name happens when people use it in a blasphemous way as an exclamation of amazement or dismay. In this way they profane the holy Name of the Lord by vainly using it while cursing. They will not go unpunished.

Natural attributes of God

God is incomparable (2 Sam. 7:22), invisible (John 1:18), inscrutable (Isa. 40:28), unchangeable (Num. 23:19), unequalled (Isa. 40:13-25), unsearchable (Rom. 11:33-34), infinite (1 Kings 8:27), eternal (Isa. 57:15), all-powerful – omnipotence (Jer. 32:17,27), ever-present – omnipresence (Ps. 139:7-12), and all-knowing – omniscience as far as the past, present *and* future are concerned (Acts 15:18; 1 John 3:20; Isa. 48:3).

Moral attributes of God

Love (1 John 4:8,16), holiness (1 Pet. 1:15; Rev. 4:8), goodness (Ex. 34:6; Ps. 31:19; 52:1 145:9), justice (Ps. 89:14), hates sin and iniquity (Ps. 5:5-7; 45:8; Heb. 1:9), impartiality (Acts. 10:34-35; 1 Pet. 1:17), mercy (Ex. 20:6; Isa. 55:7), grace (Rom. 3:23-24; 2 Cor. 9:8) truth (John 14:6, 17:17) and wrath (Ps. 2:5,12; 21:9; Rev. 6:15-17).

Likeness to the image of God

In Genesis 1:26, the Triune God says: “Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness.” In these words of the Creator, with which the Bible history of man opens, we have the revelation of the eternal purpose to which man owes his existence – the glorious, eternal future to which he is destined. God proposed to make a being who will be His very image and likeness. When sin entered and man fell from his high destiny, God did not give up His purpose. It was with this in mind that the Father sent to the earth the Son who was the express image of His Person. In Him, the Godlikeness to which we had been created, and which we personally have to appropriate to make our own, was revealed in human form.

We can only become like God with regard to His moral attributes such as love and holiness, and not with regard to His natural attributes, as we are not gods. The central thought of God’s revelation to Israel and the church is: “Be holy, for I am holy” (Lev. 11:44; 1 Pet. 1:15-16). The purpose of man’s creation can only be achieved if we die to sin by being united together in the likeness of Christ’s death, and then, through the work of the Holy Spirit, also become conformable to His resurrection (Rom. 6:5). Through faith in Christ’s death on the cross we can put off the sinful nature of the first Adam, and then “put on the new man which was created according to

God, in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph. 4:22-24). Christ is the second Adam, who alone can restore to humanity the godly life to which we were called, but have lost because of the Fall.

Personal commitment

I reaffirm my faith in the Triune God. The great God of heaven and earth has revealed Himself to me in three Persons; hence I can testify to “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit” (2 Cor. 13:14). I commit myself to gain a better knowledge of God and all His wonderful attributes, with the sincere expectation that His image which was broken in the lives of fallen men, will be fully restored in me. God did not only create the world through Jesus Christ, but also sent Him to the world as an atonement for our sins, so all sinners can become new creatures in Him. What hope was offered to the world by the possibility that people whose lives were in spiritual darkness and moral disorder, can experience the light of God’s presence which has been kindled to make all things new. I recommit myself to the Great Commission to spread the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ to lost humanity so that those who believe can pass from darkness into His marvellous light.

Questions

1. How are we introduced to the Triune God in 1 John 5?
2. Since when does the Lord Jesus exist as God and as Man?
3. In which way is the theory of evolution an attack on God?
4. Mention five names of God and explain their meanings
5. Mention and explain three natural and three moral attributes of God

2. Jesus Christ

God revealed Himself to the world through His Son. Everyone who has seen Him has seen the Father (John 14:7-11), “for in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Col. 2:9). It is important to know that during His incarnation Jesus only temporarily left His heavenly glory and humbled Himself to take the form of a servant who died on the cross for our sins (Phil. 2:6-9). As a man He parted with His glory but not with His status and power as God, which accounts for the fact that He was Emmanuel – God with us (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23). From a study of the different names, titles and offices of the Lord Jesus we will clearly understand who He is, for what reasons He came to the earth, what He does on our behalf in the heaven at present, and what will happen when He returns to earth during His Second Coming.

The names of the Lord Jesus can be placed in the following four categories:

1. His personal name

The Name Jesus (The Lord is salvation; Heb. Yeshua) was given by God the Father to His Son. For Him to be, according to God’s standards, the Saviour of Israel *and* the whole world, Jesus had to be the perfect God-man. He had to be born as a human being (from the royal lineage of David in Israel’s tribe of Judah) to be the Son of man. Nevertheless, He could not be procreated by a

man as He could have no part in the original sin of the human race. By God's intervention He had to be born of a virgin to also be the Son of God (Luke 1:27,35).

2. His name as God

In His capacity as God Jesus is equal to and one with the Father (John 10:30; 14:9), and can, therefore, also be referred to as Lord. It is important to address Him in this capacity when we pray or talk about Him. During the outpouring of the Holy Spirit the apostles received the full revelation of the deity of Jesus, and in the light of this knowledge refer to Him as "the Lord Jesus" (Eph. 1:15), "our God and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:1), and "the true God and eternal life" (1 John 5:20). Every tongue will confess that He is Lord (Phil. 2:9-11).

3. His official name

The Lord Jesus is also the Anointed One (Heb. Mashiach [Messiah]; Gr. Christos [Christ]) who was anointed by the Spirit of the Lord for His mission to save lost humanity by proclaiming liberty to the captives of Satan (Isa. 61:1; John 1:41). Christ is an inclusive official title that combines eight titles that can only be fulfilled by Himself. The offices for which Christ was anointed, and the titles associated with them, are as follows:

3.1. Lamb of God

The most important reason why Jesus Christ was anointed and sent into the world was to redeem fallen humanity from their sins. To be able to do this, He had to come in the likeness of man so that He could offer Himself as a sacrifice for our sins by shedding His blood and physically dying on the cross. He had to become the sacrificial Lamb of God (Heb. 10:4-5,7,10). John the Baptist introduced Him as the Lamb of God (John 1:29). Long ago, Isaiah prepared the people of Israel for the great sacrifice of the Lamb of God (Isa. 53:5-7). No contemplation of Him is adequate without appreciating the profound significance of His shed blood (Rom. 3:25-27).

- Our salvation and rebirth is based on the blood (Rom. 5:9; Eph. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; Rev. 1:5).
- Our continued cleansing is also based on the blood (1 John 1:7; Heb. 9:14; 10:12,19; 1 Cor. 5:6-7).
- The blood is a mighty weapon against the attacks of the enemy (Rev. 12:11).

The capacity of Christ as the Lamb of God who laid down His life for sinners, forms the basis of all His offices. Because He paid the ransom for our sins, He can act as Prophet, High Priest, Mediator, Servant, Shepherd, Head of His redeemed Church, and King over His inheritance. He is also qualified to be Judge of His own servants appointed by Him, and on judgement day will judge all who have rejected or neglected His atoning sacrifice on the cross.

3.2 Prophet

A prophet is a person whom God inspires to declare His word, His will and His judgements through preaching the truth. Jesus Christ was a great prophet. Among His greatest sermons are the Sermon on the Mount, the parables and His prophetic discourse. He revealed great truths about God's plan for humanity, which were kept secret from the foundation of the world (Matt. 13:35; Luke 8:1).

3.3 High Priest and Mediator

Jesus Christ is the High Priest and Mediator of the New Covenant, of which He is also the surety (Heb. 7:22; 8:1-6; 9:15). In that He Himself has suffered by being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted (Heb. 2:17-18; 4:15-16). As High Priest and Mediator He is our Advocate at the Father's throne (1 John 2:1-2).

3.4 Servant

Jesus is the Servant of God who came to earth to do the great work of salvation for all nations (Isa. 49:5-6; 50:10). The characteristics of a servant are humility and submission in the service of his master, and for that reason Jesus strongly warned His disciples against self-exalting pride (Mark 10:42-45; cf. Phil. 2:5-9).

3.5 Shepherd

As the Shepherd of His flock, Jesus Christ is totally committed to their well-being since He has redeemed them at such a great cost (John 10:11). He gives them a firm assurance of salvation (John 10:7,9). He promised them abundant life (John 10:10), and also assured them that He will never leave nor forsake them (Heb. 13:5; Isa. 40:10-11).

3.6 Head of His church

Jesus Christ is the Head of His church (Eph. 1:22). The unity between Him and His church is likened to a marriage relationship (Eph. 5:23). From Eph. 5:25-27 it is evident that Christ not only cleansed the church but also sanctified her to present her to Himself holy and without blemish.

3.7 King

The Lord Jesus has all power in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18) and worthily holds the office of King. In this dispensation, the nations have rebelled against His authority as they were deceived by Satan (2 Cor. 4:4). This situation will radically change when the King returns to earth at the end of the great tribulation (Ps. 2:1-12; Rev. 11:15; 19:11-21; Acts 15:16-17; Isa. 9:6).

3.8 Judge

All Christians will appear before the judgement seat of Christ to give account of their lives after salvation (2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:10,12). During the coming tribulation period, His wrath will be poured out upon the wicked people (Rev. 6:16-17). After the millennium He will be the Judge of all lost people of all ages (Acts 17:30-31; Rev. 20:11-15).

4. His descriptive names

There are many descriptive names of the Lord Jesus in the Bible. These names emphasise particular aspects of His Person and works, so that we may know and understand Him better and love Him more. The following are a few examples of these names:

- **The light of the world.** He is the true light who gives light to all people. Everyone who follows Him shall not walk in darkness (John 1:4,9; 8:12).

- **The Word of God.** He is the Word who became flesh that by His death on the cross He could be the Saviour of fallen humanity (John 1:1,14; Heb. 10:10; 1 John 5:7; Rev. 19:13).
- **The bread and water of life.** He is the true bread and water of life who alone can satisfy the deep spiritual needs of humanity (John 6:33-35).
- **The rock and foundation.** He is the solid Rock upon which the lives of all Christians are built. That is why we can stand firm even in the midst of the most severe storms in life (1 Cor. 3:11; Matt. 7:24-27; Ps. 40:2).
- **The way, the truth and the life.** He is the only way to heaven as He alone can give us eternal life. His promises are true (John 11:25-26; 14:6; 2 Cor. 1:20).
- **The true vine.** The life in Christ is like a branch in the vine, which bears much fruit. The life comes from Him for without Him we can do nothing (John 15:1-2,5).
- **The Wisdom of God.** He reveals the wisdom of God to us and gives us enlightened eyes of our understanding to have spiritual discernment (1 Cor. 1:23,24,30; Eph. 1:18; Col. 2:3).
- **The Advocate.** When Christians are sinning and confess and forsake their sins, Jesus acts as their Advocate at God's throne (1 John 2:1) where Satan also accuses them (Rev. 12:10).
- **The Conqueror.** He conquered the enemy and will crush him under our feet (Rom. 16:20). In Christ Jesus we can be more than conquerors (Rom. 8:37).
- **The Sanctifier.** He does not only save us but also sanctifies us so we can live victoriously and appear before Him one day without blemish (1 Cor. 1:30; 5:7-8; Eph. 5:25-27; 1 Thess. 4:3,7).
- **The Bright and Morning Star.** In Him we have the sure hope on a new day that will dawn over this dark world during His Second Coming (Rev. 2:28; 22:16; cf. 2 Pet. 1:19).
- **The Bridegroom.** What a blessed hope we have as the bride of the heavenly Bridegroom to look forward to our union with Him, and then to be with Him forever (Matt. 25:1-13; 2 Cor. 11:2-3; 1 Thess. 4:16-17).

Personal commitment

My prayer is that I will be a dedicated follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, that I will be continually cleansed by His precious blood (1 John 1:7), that I will grow in His grace and knowledge (2 Pet. 3:18), that I will never fail Him by denying His virgin birth, His deity, the great significance of His death on the cross or the promises of His Second Coming – that I will put on the Lord Jesus daily and not make provision for the flesh to fulfil its lusts (Rom. 13:14). “Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place” (2 Cor. 2:14).

Questions

1. What is the meaning of the name Jesus?
2. Explain the deity of Jesus.
3. Name and discuss three offices of Christ

4. What is the significance of the blood of Christ that was shed?
5. Name and discuss three descriptive names of Christ

3. The Holy Spirit

God's Spirit is known by different names, among which are the following: The Spirit (John 7:39), the Spirit of God (Gen. 1:2), The Spirit of the LORD (Isa. 11:2), the Spirit of the Father (Matt. 10:20), the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9), the Spirit of the Son (Gal. 4:6), the Holy Spirit (Ps. 51:11), the eternal Spirit (Heb. 9:14), the Comforter (John 14:16), the Spirit of grace (Zech. 12:10), the Spirit of truth (John 14:17), the Spirit of holiness (Rom. 1:4), the Spirit of life (John 6:63; Rom. 8:2), the Spirit of adoption (Rom. 8:15), The Spirit of wisdom and understanding (Isa. 11:2), the Spirit of counsel and might (Isa. 11:2), the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD (Isa. 11:2), the Spirit of glory (1 Pet. 4:14), and the Spirit of prophecy (Rev. 19:10; John 16:13).

God reveals Himself in different ways through the Holy Spirit. These revelations take the form of various ministries of the Spirit, of which the following are the most important:

The Spirit who convicts of sin and righteousness and judgement

When the Holy Spirit communicates with a person He convicts him of his sins, of the righteousness of Jesus Christ and of the judgements proclaimed over the devil and all the wicked people (John 16:8-11). All people are sinners (Rom. 3:10-12). The biggest sin is to reject the Lord Jesus as Saviour and Son of God (Matt. 23:32-38). God's righteousness demands a life which meets the standard of His holiness (1 Pet. 1:15). When people fail to meet this standard because they are slaves of sin, God's justice demands the death penalty upon sinners (Rom. 6:23; Ezek. 18:4). This ruling condemns the entire humanity before God (Rom. 3:10). Only the Lord Jesus led a perfect life in accordance with the righteousness of God. Through His death on the cross He served the death penalty on behalf of all sinners, thereby satisfying God's demand of a just punishment for sin. The righteousness of God is imputed to all people who believe in the substitutionary death of Christ (Rom. 5:17). Our garment of sin is laid on Him, while we are clothed with His garment of righteousness when we accept Him as our Saviour. Many people still try to establish their own righteousness based on a good life, thereby rejecting the very heart of the gospel of the cross (Rom. 10:3). Such people glory in their good works and church membership, but resist the Holy Spirit when He wants to convict them of the righteousness of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The death and resurrection of Jesus was also a judgement upon Satan (John 12:31), as Christ triumphed over these dark powers (Col. 2:15). Although Satan was defeated, he is still engaged in an active battle against all Christians (1 Pet. 5:8); but he is a condemned enemy of God whose fate has already been determined (Rev. 20:2,7-10). All people who collaborate with him in his rebellion against God will share his judgement in hell (Rev. 20:10,15).

The Spirit of grace and supplication

The Holy Spirit works in the lives of all people who hear the gospel message and moves them to humble themselves with sorrow, under conviction of sin and in brokenness of heart, before the Saviour, Jesus Christ, to pray for His saving grace. The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit (Ps. 34:18; 51:17). During the coming tribulation, the Spirit of grace and supplication will be poured out over Israel (Zech. 12:10).

The Spirit who gives life

“It is the Spirit who gives life” (John 6:63). He regenerates repentant sinners who were dead in their sins and trespasses, to give them new life (Rom. 8:2; 2 Cor. 5:17). Unsaved people are spiritually dead, and are made alive by the Holy Spirit when they repent and trust the Lord to save their souls. Saved people have passed from death to life (John 5:24; Eph. 5:14). When we are born again, the Holy Spirit baptises us into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13).

The Spirit who endues with power

After the Spirit of God has regenerated us by virtue of the saving grace of Christ, we must be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit for the following three reasons:

1. It empowers us to be effective witnesses of Christ (Acts. 1:8). Without this endowment with power from on high we cannot work for the Lord.
2. We need the power of the Lord to grow from a weak babe in Christ to a mature man or woman in Christ (Eph. 4:13-14). We must gain insight into the deeper things of the Lord to be able to walk the path of faith with boldness and confidence.
3. We need the power of the Lord to be strong for the struggle against the kingdom of darkness (Eph. 6:10-11). It is only when we are filled with the Spirit that we will have the strength to withstand the temptations to sin (Gal. 5:16).

The Spirit who equips for service

When the Holy Spirit fills the believers He also gives them gifts to equip them for particular ministries or service in the body of Christ (Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Pet. 4:10). The one may have a gift of teaching, another of intercession or encouragement, but everything must be done in a spirit of love as that is the greatest gift of all. We should actively practise our gifts and not be restrained by fear of people to do so (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6-7). The Holy Spirit Himself will decide on which gifts to give to people (1 Cor. 12:4-11). These gifts may be widely diverging, as many support services are needed in proclaiming and spreading the gospel message throughout the world.

The Spirit of fruitful service

All saved people are commanded to bear spiritual fruit to the glory of God and the extension of His kingdom (Matt. 3:8; Rom. 6:22). Nine fruits of the Spirit are mentioned (Gal. 5:22-23). Our relationship with God must be characterised by His love which is poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5), by the joy of the Lord because He has saved our souls and by His peace that surpasses all understanding. Towards our fellow men we must be long-suffering by continually praying for them and being slow to condemn them; we must also be friendly and strive to do good to them in various ways. As individuals we must be faithful in the execution of our duties, while having a gentle and teachable spirit, and always practise self-control.

The Spirit who guides and sanctifies us

The Holy Spirit is leading and helping us. He gives us a consciousness of the continued presence and indwelling of the Lord in our lives, so we never have to feel alone. We should realise that our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, and that we are under an obligation to lead holy lives (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 2 Cor. 7:1).

The Spirit of wisdom

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of wisdom (Isa. 11:2). He gives us enlightened eyes of our understanding (Eph. 1:17-18; Ps. 147:5). Should we have doubts on any matter we must ask God for wisdom (Jas, 1:5). In the Triune God is hidden all treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3). The Lord wants to guide and instruct you through His Spirit (Ps. 32:8).

The Spirit of truth

We must know and observe the whole truth about the way of the Lord, and for that purpose we need the Spirit of truth to guide us into the whole truth of God's Word (John 16:13; 1 John 2: 27). The truth of God has the power to set us free (John 8:32), but for that to be realised we need an intensive knowledge of and faith in the Bible. Only then will we walk in the light of the Word and have a well-developed ability of discernment under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (1 John 4:1-6).

The Spirit of prophecy

John 16:13 says that the Holy Spirit will reveal to us things to come. He gives us an expectation of the Second Coming of Jesus, and helps us to understand Biblical prophecies and to rightly divide the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15). Do not despise prophecies (1 Thess. 5:20). By observing the fulfilment of Biblical prophecies the Holy Spirit is preparing us for future events. If we have this outlook we will not lose our expectation of the Lord's imminent coming and hence not fall asleep spiritually during the midnight hour of this dispensation.

The Holy Spirit Himself warns us against great spiritual deception and departing from the faith that will occur in the end-time (1 Tim. 4:1). The deception will be driven by Satan's spirit of error (1 John 4:6), who will have many false prophets at his disposal (1 John 4:1). Sensational signs and wonders will be used by them, as well as extra-Biblical revelations on what God allegedly said to the "prophet" or "apostle." In this way, a distorted presentation will be given of Jesus, of the gospel message *and* of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 11:4). The Holy Spirit, who guides faithful children of God in all the truth of the Word, and also helps us to discern truth and error, is clearly warning us against these end-time phenomena (John 16:13).

Personal commitment

I am full of gratitude to the Holy Spirit for having convicted me of my sin and lost state, and for the forgiveness and righteousness that is offered to me through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. After I accepted His friendly invitation of salvation in faith, He baptised me into the body of Christ through rebirth. I am full of praise for the Lord's work of grace through the Holy Spirit, who also meets all my needs: he dethrones the flesh and fills my heart and whole being; He endues me with power from on high to enable me to be a witness for Jesus; He gives me enlightened eyes of the mind to understand the Bible and to be able to discern all things from a spiritual perspective; and He gives me peace in my heart when I take the right decisions. I commit myself to a life of obedience to God when He leads me through His Spirit, and also to self-discipline to refrain from doing things that will grieve the Holy Spirit. May I daily walk in the Spirit in such a way that I will never fulfil the lust of the flesh. I thank God for a life of victory under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Questions

1. Name and discuss five descriptive names of the Holy Spirit.

2. Of what does the Holy Spirit convict us?
3. What is the role of the Spirit in the work that we have to do for the Lord?
4. What is the function of the Holy Spirit in Biblical prophecies?
5. Where in the NT is it mentioned that the Holy Spirit has an eternal existence?

4. The Word of God

The word “Bible” is derived from the Greek word *Biblia* which means *Books*. The Bible is composed of an Old Testament with 39 books and a New Testament with 27 books – a total of 66 books. These books were written at different times and in many different places, but they were collected under the guidance of God’s Spirit and form a wonderful unity. In the Bible itself these books are referred to as the “holy Scriptures” (2 Tim. 3:15). They all constitute the Word of God because the authors have written them under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21).

We are living in a time of great falling away from the truth, and evangelical Christians must observe and honour the Bible. The Word of God is a precious gift that was given to us. It is dynamic and living, and fulfils various spiritual needs in our lives. The Word has, according to its own statements, the following clear and unique characteristics:

It is a revelation of God and His works

Firstly, it should be realised that the Bible does not contain the words of men but the Word of God. It reveals the nature of the Triune God, the works of His creation, including the origin of man, the existence and plans of a hostile kingdom under the leadership of Satan who was cast out of heaven by God, the wretchedness and moral depravity of humanity due to of the Fall, God’s calling of Israel and the giving of His laws of righteousness, His saving grace for all humanity through the death and resurrection of Jesus, the wrath of God upon the wicked who rejected His offer of salvation, the Second Coming of Christ, the establishment of the kingdom of heaven on earth, and the future of humanity – the saved ones in the new heaven and on the new earth, and the wicked with Satan and his demons in the lake of fire. A large part of the Bible is devoted to supporting the spiritual growth of believers and to equip and empower them to stand against all the spiritual deception of a hostile world (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The Bible is not a collection of human thoughts about God but a Book that was “given” by God (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21). The divine inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible as it was written in the original languages has been firmly established – among others, by the remarkable fulfilment of prophecies. The clear revelation of Jesus Christ as God the Son is elevated far above all theological speculation and vain reasoning.

It is associated with a Person

All the promises of God in the Bible are related to a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the incarnate Word (John 1:1,4,14). The spoken and written Word of God testify of the Saviour, Jesus Christ, and is therefore closely associated with Him. In Him all promises in the Bible are Yes and Amen as He paid the price for their fulfilment on the cross (2 Cor. 1:20; Eph. 1:7). Because of the close relationship between Christ and the Word we cannot fully know and love the Lord Jesus if we neglect the study of His Word (John 14:23).

It has creative power

The Word of God has creative power (2 Pet. 3:5), also in the lives of people who were dead in their sins and iniquities (Rom. 1:16). All true believers know that there is quickening power in the Word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord. The believing Roman centurion said to Jesus: "...only speak a word, and my servant will be healed" (Matt. 8:8).

It is pure

The inerrancy and flawlessness of the Word are proof of the fact that it is absolutely pure. It is unchanging and trustworthy (Ps. 12:6; 119:140). It is worthy of all acceptance that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners (1 Tim. 1:15).

It is like a fire and a hammer

The Word is like a consuming fire and a hammer which breaks a rock in pieces (Jer. 23:29). It can soften the hardest heart and break down every wall of resistance. If we have a teachable spirit and receive the Word into our minds and hearts, it will be like a fire which consumes all human theories and false ideas about life. Instead of our distorted views of the past we will receive divine wisdom and insight, which is described as enlightened eyes of the mind (Eph. 1:18).

It saves the souls of sinners

We must receive the Word with meekness as its message can save our souls (Jas. 1:21; 1 Pet. 1:23). The Lord Jesus gave intensive teachings to the disciples and opened their understanding that they might comprehend the Scriptures that testify of Him (Luke 24:44-45; John 5:37-40). If they reject the Word they will die in their sins (John 8:24). Jesus reprimanded them because His Word had no place in them (John 8:37). The most important reason for their resentment of the Word was the wayward opinions of Israel's spiritual leaders who deceived the nation and thus shut up the kingdom of heaven against men (Matt. 23:13).

It is spirit and life

The words of Christ are spirit and they are life (John 6:63). After being born again we should nourish ourselves daily with the Word to become mature Christians, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (1 Pet. 2:2; Eph. 4:13-14; 1 Tim. 4:6). This spiritual food is essential (Luke 4:4). Pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit as only He can teach you and guide you into the whole truth of God's Word (John 14:26; 16:13; 1 Cor. 2:10).

It is a two-edged sword

The Word is like a two-edged sword that pierces into our deepest being where it discerns the thoughts and intents of our hearts (Heb. 4:12). It reveals to us which thoughts are carnal and which are spiritual.

It gives direction to our lives

It directs our steps away from the paths of sin and iniquity (Ps. 119:101,133; Josh. 1:7). By accepting the promises of the Bible in faith we are hiding God's Word in our hearts that we might not sin against Him (Ps. 119:11). The lives of all people who are not anchored to Christ and His Word have been built on sand. They will certainly fall down and come to eternal grief when they encounter the storms of God's judgements (Matt. 7:24-27).

It illuminates our lives

All Christians should let the light of God's Word shine in the world so that sinners may repent (Acts 26:18). Every unsaved person is caught in the darkness of sin and should, by way of a spiritual rebirth, come out of the darkness of Satan into God's marvellous light. In the light of God's Word we realise our sinfulness and need for salvation (Eph. 5:14).

It reveals the future

Prophecies that reveal future events are an important part of God's Word. Paul says that we should not despise prophecies (1 Thess. 5:20). A special blessing is promised to us if we study the prophetic Word and take its message to heart (Rev. 1:3). It reaffirms the certainty of our hope in Christ, while also giving information on the future strategies that Satan will follow in his relentless efforts to deceive Christians.

It will not return to God void

The Word of God either leads to the salvation and spiritual growth of people or to their condemnation due to unbelief: it will not return to God void (Isa. 55:10-11). The Word of God will be fulfilled in all respects (Rev. 17:17) – for believers *and* unbelievers (Num. 23:19). With His perfect foreknowledge God knows what will happen in the future. Consequently, He could supply our every need before the time and also announced appropriate penalties for the wicked (Rev. 20:15). The Lord has no pleasure in the death of the wicked but rather in his repentance (Isa. 55:6-7). That is why the message of repentance is proclaimed to all nations (Acts 17:30-31). In the light of these facts we should hold fast the Word of life (Phil. 2:16).

It endures forever

“The Word of the Lord endures for ever” (1 Pet. 1:25; Matt. 24:35). It will always remain effective, never become irrelevant or redundant, and will prevail after the present heaven and earth have passed away. Every word will be fulfilled. Together with the psalmist we have every reason to rejoice in our eternal God, His everlasting Word and His enduring mercies (Ps. 19:9-10; 29:10; 37:18; 44:8; 73:26; 92:8; 111:3; 119:93,160; 135:13).

Extra-biblical revelations

Does the Lord speak to you through His Word, or do you wait on Him to speak to you in other ways outside His Word? Oswald Chambers (*My Utmost for His Highest*) explains this point in the following way: “Jesus says: ‘The words that I speak to you are spirit, and *they* are life’ (John 6:63). That is the way God speaks to us, not by visions and dreams, but by words. When a man gets to God it is by the most simple way of words.”

We can avoid many fallacies if we observe the sound principle of *Sola Scriptura* (only the Word). Even when we are tempted to attach significance to dreams and visions, we are still not allowed to convey these messages to other people as revelations of God's will. We only have one clear command concerning God's will: “Preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season” (2 Tim. 4:2). God has revealed His whole counsel to us in the Bible (Acts 20:27). Direct your steps according to His Word! (Ps. 119:133).

Personal commitment

I accept the Bible as the inspired and inerrant Word of God. It is a precious gift from heaven as God has revealed Himself through His Word to humanity. The holy Scriptures do not only give the promise of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life but also instructions on how to build, strengthen and sustain this life with a view to reaching its full potential. Through His Word, the Lord wants to make me complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. May He keep me from ignorance about His Word which is living and powerful, so I will never be guilty of the following reproach: "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God" (Matt. 22:29). May the Word of Christ dwell in me richly (Col. 3:16; Rom. 10:8-9), that I may be rooted and grounded in His love (Eph. 3:17). "I have restrained my feet from every evil way" (Ps. 119:101).

Questions

1. Explain whether the Bible is the words of men or the Word of God.
2. What is the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Word?
3. Explain the Bible's role as a two-edged sword.
4. How is the Bible related to our salvation?
5. Should we look for extra-biblical revelations of God's will?

5. Satan and His Kingdom

The kingdom of darkness is an ominous reality of which every person should be informed. Satan and his demons – the fallen angels who were cast out of heaven because of their rebellion against God – are engaged in a fierce battle against God and His kingdom as they strive for power and reverence on earth.

It is important to note that Satan is progressively exposed in the Bible by his works and the descriptive names given to him. These names are further indications of his motives, strategies and evil character. Satan and his demons operate from mystical spheres in the abyss (Luke 8:31) and also from heavenly realms (Eph. 6:12), but prefer to conceal their true identity for the sake of greater acceptance. Initially, they took on the identity of various idols, and even ancestral spirits, to ensure that people unknowingly worship them by sacrificing to these gods and spirits. This practice became widely established throughout many centuries. In NT times, Christians are sternly warned against any form of idolatry, as it is only a smokescreen behind which the devils conceal themselves (1 Cor. 10:19-21).

During the OT, heathen nations worshipped many Baals, Ashtoreths and other idols (Judg. 2:11-13; 1 Sam. 12:10) and often seduced Israel to participate in these false religions. Idolatry was practiced in conjunction with other occult activities such as spiritism, divination, magic and witchcraft, all being works of the darkness by which Satan deceives people. Israel was clearly warned against these evil practices (Deut. 18:10-14). Astrology is condemned in the same vein (Isa. 47:12-14).

There are also concepts in the OT that are more directly linked to Satan and his demons, and even examples of open Satanism. The Hebrew word *sa-ir* means devil or demon (Lev. 17:7;

2 Chron. 11:15). In *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the OT* the word *sa-ir* is rendered "hairy demon in shape of he-goat." Among Satanists, the devil is portrayed as a black goat, a human-like creature with the head of a goat, or an abominable creature with the twisted face of a human and the horns of a goat on his head. The OT also uses the word *shed* for the devil (Deut. 32:17). In Psalm 106:37-38 an ancient form of Satanism is described in which people sacrificed their children to demons. In this case idols and demons are equated with one another.

As a clear and direct revelation of Satan, his name only appears in a few of places in the OT. Satan means Adversary or Enemy, denoting the fact that he is the great adversary of God and the believers (1 Chron. 21:1; Zech. 3:1). In these verses, two descriptive names of him are mentioned, i.e. provoker (KJV) and opposer.

In the NT, both the names Satan and devil are used. Devil is derived from the Greek word *diabolos*, meaning slanderer or false accuser. Other names used for the devil in the NT are the wicked one (Matt. 13:19), mammon, the god of money (Luke 16:13), the angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14), the deceiver (Rev. 12:9), the father of lies (John 8:44), Apollyon, the destroyer (Rev. 9:11), Beelzebub, the fly-god or dung-god (Matt. 12:24), Belial, the worthless one (2 Cor. 6:15), the accuser (Rev. 12:10), the murderer (John 8:44), the prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2), the ruler of this world (John 12:31), the tempter (1 Thess. 3:5), the serpent (Rev. 12:9), the dragon (Rev. 12:9), the roaring lion (1 Pet. 5:8), and the god of this age (2 Cor. 4:4).

Satan is heading the kingdom of darkness and has many evil spirits, or demons, under his control. Since the Fall he also controls and manipulates the unsaved people who are spiritually dead and inclined towards him. God delivers us from this power of darkness (Col. 1:13). The devil makes every effort in his power to take charge of God's creation and destroy it. He also tries to avert the restoration of the image of God in human beings by blinding them spiritually and making them slaves of sin. His final objective is to be worshipped and served in the place of God (Rev. 13:2,4). He intends to have the Antichrist (the counterfeit Christ) appointed to a position of authority as King of the world. He also tries to oppose and replace the Holy Spirit by influencing and controlling people spiritually by deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons (1 Tim. 4:1). We need the whole armour of God to be able to stand against the wiles of the devil, as he and his demons are the rulers of the darkness of this age (Eph. 6:11-12).

The position of spiritual power that Satan attained on earth results from the Fall. All people are born with a sinful nature and therefore participate in Satan's rebellion against God. They are spiritually dead and morally depraved (Rom. 3:10-18). Even after the coming of Christ most people still prefer darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil (John 3:19). That is the reason why the devil is called the ruler and also the god of this fallen, evil world (John 14:30; 2 Cor. 4:4). John says that the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one (1 John 5:19). His influence is extensive. Satan uses various methods to deceive humanity spiritually, of which the following are the most important ones:

False prophets. In his most disguised form, Satan attacks the church of Christ by infiltrating it with false prophets who pretend to be apostles and ministers of Christ (2 Cor. 11:14-15; cf. Matt. 7:15; 1 John 4:1). They utterly distort and falsify the Word of God to deceive people (2 Cor. 11:13-15) and make them to walk in darkness.

False religions. In a more direct way, humanity is deceived by the false religions into worshipping idols that are disguised demons. Anyone participating in these sacrifices has fellowship with demons (1 Cor. 10:19-20). The heathen are not aware that Satan has deceived them in this way. He blinded their minds so that they will not want to worship God through Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:4).

Occult powers. A more ostensible revelation of Satan is by means of occult or mystical practices. He still does not associate these powers openly with his name and his kingdom, with the view that people may be more easily deceived into becoming unfaithful to God. The power of Satan is marketed and promoted by practices such as magic, witchcraft, spiritism, astrology, transcendental meditation, fortune-telling, astral projection, extrasensory perception, clairvoyance, etc.

Satanism. The direct revelation of Satan, because of the inherent repulsiveness of the idea, can only be made to highly deceived, morally decadent, and spiritually degenerate people. In the past, these direct revelations were confined to a relatively few small groups of people, but during the past two decades their numbers have vastly increased throughout the world. To these worshippers, Satan and his demons reveal themselves in all their abomination, vileness and bloodthirstiness, and demand to be worshipped. During the coming tribulation period, this practice will occur widely (Rev. 9:20; 13:4).

Although Jesus Christ defeated Satan on the cross he is not yet bound in pit and removed from the spiritual battle-field. Christ can destroy his works in our lives (1 John 3:8) and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can prevail against his temptations and attacks (Eph. 6:11). But we have to remain vigilant and put on the armour of light (Rom. 13:12). The devil will only lose his position as ruler over the wicked world at the Second Coming of Christ, when he will be bound in the bottomless pit (Rev. 20:2-3). Until then, the struggle will continue.

Strategies of Satan

There are various strategies that Satan follows to deceive people and get them in his power:

Adversary. In the first and most important aspect of the fight of faith the devil is described as the Christian's adversary who seeks your downfall or harm in all spheres of life (1 Pet. 5:8-9). He is intent on destroying your health, your property, your marriage and everything you have in an effort to make you despondent and drive you to all sorts of irresponsible actions.

Tempter. The devil tempts people to commit moral sins by enticing them through their unregenerate nature and fleshly lusts. We have to guard against these temptations (Matt. 26:41), seek the help of the Lord (Heb. 2:18; 4:15-16), and put off the old nature by mortifying Satan's ally in our lives, which is the flesh (Rom. 6:6; 8:13).

Deceiver. As deceiver, the main thrust of the devil is to distort the truth about God and His Word, and to spread various lies about Christianity. He does this by sowing doubt in people's minds about Biblical truths, thereby promoting deception and spiritual backsliding (Matt. 24:4-5,24; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Pet. 2:1-2; 2 Cor. 11:13-15).

Robber. Satan intends robbing Christians by impoverishing them spiritually and materially (John 10:10). He seeks your downfall and the loss of your crown in the service of the Lord (Rev. 3:11; 2 John v. 8; cf. Heb. 12:15-17). Rather restore your broken relationship with the Lord as He pardons abundantly (Isa. 55:7) and will not remain angry when backsliders repent (Jer. 3:12).

Accuser. The devil also attacks believers by actively accusing them (Rev. 12:10). He accuses Christians at the throne of God after he has successfully tempted or deceived them. However, if we immediately turn from our sins and confess them (1 John 2:1-2), we have an Advocate with the Father at His throne in heaven, who pleads on our behalf. Satan also sows seeds of discord among Christians by accusing the one by the other, thereby harming the work of the Lord. Resist incitements of this nature (Col. 3:13). We must indeed oppose the false prophets, but live wisely with fellow-brethren, forbearing and forgiving one another (Gal. 6:1-2).

Personal commitment

I resolve to give the devil no place in my life (Eph. 4:27) and to put on the full armour of God to be able to stand against his wiles. When he attacks, tempts or tries to rob me, I will subject myself in prayer to God and resist the devil (Jas. 4:7). When I take refuge in the Conqueror, the enemy will flee away. I thank the Lord that He delivers me daily from the evil one (Matt. 6:13). I realise the seriousness of the battle against sin, the world and the devil, but I also realise that there is abundant grace to keep me standing in the battle.

Questions

1. Discuss the meanings of the names *Satan*, *devil* and *mammon*.
2. How did the devil reveal himself in the OT?
3. Mention and describe five descriptive names of the devil in the NT.
4. How does the devil make use of false religions to achieve his purpose?
5. Which four methods or institutions does Satan use to deceive humanity?
6. Name and discuss five strategies followed by Satan in his subversive work.

6. Sin

One of the central themes of the Bible is sin. It offers a review of the origin, nature and results of sin, as well as the solution to the sin problem.

Sin is:

Transgressions of God's laws – Dan. 9:5; Rom. 5:13; Jas. 2:9; 1 John 3:4.

Unrighteousness – Ex. 20:5; 34:7; Num. 14:18; Deut. 5:9; 1 Kings. 8:47; 2 Chron. 6:37; Isa. 1:4; 13:11; 53:6; 59:12; Jer. 30:14.

Unintentional contraventions of God's commandments – Lev. 4:2,13,22,27; Heb. 5:2.

Adultery and fornication – Lev. 20:10; 1 Cor. 5:11; 6:9; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5.

Homosexual and lesbian relations – Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Rom. 1:26-28; 1 Cor. 6:10.

Involvement with occult activities – Lev. 18:21; 20:27; Deut. 18:9-14; 1 Cor. 10:7,14,19-20; Rev. 2:20.

The love of money – Matt. 13:22; 19:23-24; Luke 12:15; 1 Tim. 6:7-10; 2 Tim. 3:2; Rev. 3:17.

Drunkenness and other forms of addiction – Prov. 20:1; 23:20,29-36; Isa. 5:11,22; 28:7; Rom. 13:13; 1 Cor. 5:11; 6:10; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:18; 2 Pet. 2:19.

Neglect of duty – Matt. 23:3; Luke 6:46-49; John 13:17; 15:22; Jas. 4:17.

Every deed which is condemned by your conscience – Luke 12:47; John 9:41, 15:22; Rom. 14:14; 1 Cor. 8:7.

Every deed that is not in faith – Rom. 14:23.

Thoughts of the unregenerate heart – Gen. 6:5; 8:21; Prov.. 6:14; 15:26; Isa. 59:7; Jer. 17:9, 18:12; Ezek. 11:2.

The origin and habitation of sin:

The devil is the cause of sin and the father of all sinners – John 8:44; 1 John 3:8.

Sin entered the world through Adam – Gen. 3:6-12; Rom. 5:12,19; 1 Tim. 2:14.

Every person is born in sin – Gen. 8:21; Job. 15:14; 25:4; Ps. 51:7; 58:4; Isa. 48:8; John 3:6.

Sin comes from the heart – Ps. 95:10; Isa. 57:17; Matt. 15:19; Mark 7:21-23; Heb. 3:10.

Every person is a sinner – 1 Kings 8:46; 2 Chron. 6:36; Ps. 14:1-3; 53:2-4; 106:6; Prov. 20:9; Eccles. 7:20; Isa. 64:6; Rom. 3:10,12,23; 5:12; Gal. 3:22; Jas. 3:2; 1 John 1:8; 5:19.

He who says that he has no sin is a liar – 1 John 1:8. Such a person also makes God a liar – 1 John 1:10.

Jesus Christ alone was without sin – John 8:46; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15, 7:26; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 John 3:5.

Sin is called:

Transgressions and rebelliousness against God – Isa. 1:28, 59:13, 65:2; Lam. 3:42; Dan. 9:5; Titus 1:16.

An abomination to the Lord – Prov. 15:9; Jer. 44:4.

The fruit of desire – Jas. 1:15.

Uncleanness, filthiness or pollutions – Lev. 15:31; 16:19; Ezra 9:11; Ezek. 24:13; 36:17,25,29; Zech. 13:1; Matt. 15:18-20; Mark 7:20-23; 2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Thess. 4:7; Jas. 1:27; 2 Pet. 2:20.

The works of darkness – Isa. 29:15; Rom. 13:12; Eph. 5:11.

The works of the devil – John 8:41,44; 1 John 3:8.

The works of the flesh – Gal. 5:19.

The love and friendship of the world – 1 John 2:15-16; Rom. 12:2; Jas. 4:4.

Dead works – Heb. 6:1; 9:14.

The sting of death – 1 Cor. 15:56.

To live in sin means:

To walk according to the flesh – Rom. 7:5; 8:1,5; 2 Cor. 10:2; Gal. 5:13; 2 Pet. 2:10.

To fulfil the lusts of the flesh – Rom. 1:24; 13:14; Gal. 5:16; Eph. 2:3; 1 Thess. 4:5; 1 Pet. 1:14; 4:2-3; 2 Pet. 2:10; 3:3; Jude v. 16.

To walk in spiritual darkness – Prov. 2:13; Isa. 9:2; Matt. 4:16; Luke 1:79; 11:34; Acts 26:18; Rom. 1:21; Eph. 5:8; 1 John 1:6; 2:11.

The situational context of sin

National sins (Prov. 14:34). National sins are committed when a country entrenches sin in its constitution and other policy documents by allowing and protecting it. That can be done by denying the supreme authority of God in the constitution, rejecting Jesus as Saviour, King and Son of God, openly associating with one or more false religions, accepting and allowing homosexuality, legalising prostitution and gambling, offering multireligious education, promoting humanism, and in various other ways undermining Christian principles in society. Israel and its leaders in Jerusalem committed national sins against the Messiah and paid a high price for it (Luke 19:41-44).

Sins by heads of state (2 Sam. 24:10,17). There are autocratic heads of state who take decisions or do things which are contrary to God's will, and then bear the sole responsibility for them. It is only when the majority of their subjects follow their sinful examples, that they will become national sins for which the whole nation will be punished.

Personal sins (Ps. 51:5). Sinful acts are mostly committed by individuals and put the perpetrators in a position of condemnation by the Lord (Prov. 28:13; Rom. 6:23).

Secret sins (Ps. 19:12; 90:8). Many people wrongly argue that secret sins, as well as evil thoughts which are not known to other people, will not put any guilt or blame on them. However, every thought must be taken captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5).

Open sins (1 Tim. 5:24). Sins committed openly and with public approval, are equally wrong and punishable in the eyes of God. Society and its customs is not our norm for the determining of sin and unrighteousness, but the Word of God.

Shameless sins (Isa. 3:9). Hardened sinners do their evil works in public without any shame or remorse for what they have done.

Youthful sins (Ps. 25:7). These must also be confessed.

Subtle temptations

The most subtle temptations to sin are those that seem nearest to the purpose of God for our lives, which is to be conformed to His image. Lucifer's great sin was: "I will be like the Most High" (Isa. 14:14). He tempted man with the same kind of deception: "You will be like God" (Gen. 3:5). The Antichrist will also commit the same sin as he will "sit as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God" (2 Thess. 2:4). He will do that in an effort to be personally worshipped as "God" by all people on earth.

It is a sin to make yourself equal to God so as to be worshipped by people as a god. A human being can never obtain or imitate the natural attributes of God, for example His creative power, His perfect knowledge, His right to forgive sins, His authority over life and death, and His absolute perfection. We are only commanded to be conformed to God's moral attributes so that His holiness, righteousness, love and forgivingness can be seen in us. We must ever be humble and remember that we are only servants and disciples of the Lord Jesus. We are deeply dependent on Him as, in our own right, we are nothing (John 15:5).

We have a big responsibility to discern and reject the religious lies of the devil and his false prophets (1 John 4:1). That also includes the "nice-sounding" gospel messages in which all the blessings are mentioned which the Lord Jesus has in store for us, but without mentioning God's judgement upon sin, and also the full meaning of Christ's atoning death on the cross and His blood that He shed for us. There are many of these "pious" messages in circulation today, in which people are not explicitly led to a conviction of their sins, neither are they confronted with the Saviour's atonement on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. He came to purge our sins (Heb. 1:3), but for that to be imputed to us we must first realise the full nature and extent of our sins. When these basic facts on sin are concealed the gospel message becomes perverted.

Jesus Christ:

Has come to forgive our sins and take them away – John 1:29; Acts. 5:31; Heb. 9:26; 1 John 3:5.

Has come to save sinners – Matt. 1:21; 9:13; 18:11; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:32; 1 Tim. 1:15.

Has given Himself for our sins – Gal. 1:4; Titus 2:14.

Has died for our sins – Isa. 53:8; Rom. 6:10; 1 Cor. 15:3, 1 Pet. 3:18.

Has died for sinners – Rom. 5:6,8; Heb. 2:9, 9:15.

Has borne our sins – Isa. 53:4,11,12; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:24.

Has given us redemption through His blood – Matt. 26:28; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14.

He cleansed us from our sins with His blood – Titus 2:14; Heb. 1:3; 9:14; 1 John 1:7; Rev. 1:5.

The sufficiency of grace to forgive sin

Grace abounds more than sin – Rom. 5:20.

Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? – Rom. 6:1-2,15.

There is forgiveness for all – Isa. 1:18; Jer. 33:8; Matt. 12:31-32; Mark 3:28; Luke 12:10.

No sacrifice for the wilful denying, slandering and rejection of Christ after repentance – Heb. 6:4-6; 10:26-31; 12:16-17.

Personal commitment

I praise the Lord for the provision that He has made on the cross of Golgotha to save us from sin, and also for breaking the power of sin that it should have no dominion over us. The old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts *can* be put off and conquered. I thank God for the

continued cleansing from all sin by the blood of the Lamb. I realise that, as a human being, I can falter and sin again, but I pray for a close walk with the Lord and a sensitivity to sin, that I may not fall victim to deception and temptation. I take the command to heart to earnestly strive against sin (Heb. 12:4). May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in His sight (Ps. 19:14).

Questions

1. Describe the nature of sin with regard to God's law
2. Explain the sin of homosexuality.
3. Where in the Bible are ancestor worship, witchcraft and magic prohibited?
4. Give three examples of national sins.
5. How can we be cleansed from our sins?

7. Salvation

There is a definite way that the Lord Jesus follows with unbelievers to save them, equip them for service and prepare them for eternal life in heaven. The willingness and full co-operation of each one of us, according to fixed biblical guidelines, is necessary if we wish to avert the tragedy of a false repentance. We can all share in the wonderful experience to be called by the Lord out of the darkness of sin into His marvellous light.

1. Calling

God Himself shows us the first step on the way of the conversion of sinners (Rom. 8:5) as He calls sinners to repentance (Isa. 1:18). For this purpose the Son of God came to the world to call lost people to Him and offer His salvation to them (Matt. 11:28). This calling is to those who realise that they have a spiritual problem (Matt. 9:13).

It is important to recognise the specific call of the Lord Jesus to you *personally*, as this will determine how you will respond to it. It is crucial that you should realise the full extent of your problem, namely that you are heading for disaster without the Lord Jesus. There is no room for complacency or self-justification in your state of spiritual darkness, as "there is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10). You must face up to the all-embracing nature of sin, and especially your own sins which separate you from Him (Isa. 59:2). There must not be any doubt in your mind that God has imposed the death penalty upon sinners (Rom. 6:23). All unsaved people are heading for eternal condemnation if they don't repent (Matt. 25:41).

When God the Father calls us through His Son, Jesus Christ, He not only identifies our problem of sin and condemnation, but also offers the solution. The good news is that God loves us and has provided for the forgiveness of our sins through the atoning death of Jesus on the cross (1 John 4:10; 1 Pet. 3:18; 2 Cor. 5:21). The calling of God to the unsaved must be so clear that they fully realise the implications, and count the cost of becoming Christians. Jesus made Nicodemus understand that theological knowledge and a good life was not enough to inherit the kingdom of

God – he *had* to be born again (John 3:3). The condition for receiving forgiveness and eternal life is the confession and forsaking of all known sins.

The Lord Jesus told the rich young man that he first had to break with his sin of materialism and love of money (Luke 18:22). To this young man, who was otherwise very religious, it was hard to part from his besetting sin and he left sorrowfully. Many people find it hard to repent because they do not really *want* to part from their sins. It is not easy to pass through the narrow gate (Luke 13:24). However, it is a wonderful experience and something worth striving for (Luke 11:9).

2. Sorrow

The unbeliever under conviction of sin realises his need to get right with God. He is under the deep conviction of his sin and lost state. He feels accused and condemned because of what he has done. His remorse and sense of guilt drives him to Christ – the One who paid the price by dying such a cruel death for the salvation of sinners (2 Cor. 7:10). When Peter denied Jesus, he went outside and wept bitterly (Matt. 26:75). That was true sorrow leading to confession which is a condition for forgiveness. You must admit that you have made a failure of your life and trust the Lord to save your soul.

3. Repentance

When the repentant sinner realises that he needs to get right with God, he must abandon his former sinful lifestyle, confess his sins to God and ask His forgiveness (1 John 1:8-9; Prov. 28:13). Repentant sinners, as well as backslidden Christians who have again become entangled in sin and unrighteousness, must be fully prepared to abandon their old lives by confessing and forsaking all their sins (Luke 15:18; 18:13; Ps. 51:5-6,9). When we repent to the Lord Jesus we must believe:

- that He is the true God and eternal life, and the only Saviour of the world (1 John 5:20; Luke 19:10);
- that we can only be reconciled to Him by virtue of His death on the cross where He paid the penalty for our sins (Col. 1:20);
- that we have to repent with the confession of our sins to obtain His forgiveness (Matt. 9:13; Acts 17:30);
- that He is able to make us new creatures, that the old things can pass away and that everything can be made new (2 Cor. 5:17); and
- that the Lord Jesus purchases us with His blood when He saves us, and that we henceforth belong to Him to be used by Him (1 Cor. 6:19-20; 1 Pet. 1:18-19).

4. Justification

There are two aspects of the salvation of sinners, i.e. the forgiveness and blotting out of their sins (justification) and the receiving of a new life (new birth). These two aspects are closely linked because fallen humanity is spiritually dead as a result of sin and alienation from God. They need to be both justified *and* made alive. The basis for man's justification is the substitutionary death of Jesus on the cross, where He paid the penalty for our sins to demonstrate His love and grace to a dying world (Rom. 3:23-25; Isa. 53:5; Eph. 1:7). Every sinner on earth has a list of sins which

condemns him and in terms of which Satan accuses him and lays a claim on his life. Jesus blotted out this charge sheet on the cross (Col. 2:13-14).

5. Rebirth

The clear biblical exhortation to be born again is of the utmost significance in the salvation of sinners. By this concept God clearly teaches us that because of sin and alienation from God, we are spiritually dead and need Him to quicken us. Our 'old Adam' nature is a fallen, sinful nature which God says cannot be improved or changed, so we *must* be born again to become new creatures who can inherit the kingdom of God (John 3:3; 2 Cor. 5:17). During rebirth we are baptised into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13). We become part of His body. Rebirth also refers to the resurrection life of the Lord Jesus (1 Pet. 1:3; Titus 3:5-6).

The first step that a born again person should take is to testify of his salvation. According to Rom. 10:9-10 I should confess the Lord Jesus with my mouth if I am truly saved. The first confession is to Christ Himself when I receive Him as my Saviour. After that, I also give witness to other people that He saved my soul by grace.

The testimony of the new birth is also given by being baptised as a believer – that is after salvation as commanded by Christ (Mark 16:15-16; Matt. 28:19). A testimony of faith in the Lord Jesus as your Saviour is a clear condition for baptism, as exemplified in the baptism of the eunuch in Acts 8: “Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, See, *here is water*. What hinders me from being baptized? Then Philip said, If you believe with all your heart, you may. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (Acts. 8:36-37). After his confession he was baptised.

Paul and other converts were also baptised shortly after their salvation (Acts 9:18; 10:47-48; 16:31-33). The water baptism did not save them, but symbolically pointed to their spiritual baptism during salvation. From the Great Commission in Matt. 28:19 it is clear that salvation is followed by baptism, and then by intensive instruction in the Word of God with a view to making new disciples who can lead others to Christ. We should diligently follow the various steps on the way of salvation if we wish to enjoy the full blessing of the Lord upon our lives.

6. Sanctification

Born-again members of the true church of Jesus Christ are exhorted to deny themselves, be filled with the Spirit, live soberly and righteously, and bear fruit that befits repentance. The first principle of sanctification and discipleship is self-denial and the taking up of the cross (Luke 9:23; Gal. 6:14). According to Luke 14:27-33 the cross of self-denial refers to counting the cost for discipleship. You must make a choice between gratifying the lusts of the flesh (the old nature with all its worldly inclinations) and serving the Lord Jesus with your whole heart under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. If you surrender yourself completely to serve the Lord, He will fill you with His Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18). Through the power of the Holy Spirit it is possible to lead a fruitful life while doing the will of God.

7. Glorification

The final step to full salvation is glorification. This takes place at the first resurrection when all true Christians will receive glorified, immortal, resurrection bodies (1 Cor. 15:51-52). Full details of our glorified condition in heaven have not yet been revealed to us, but we do know that when Jesus appears we will be like Him. He is the Bridegroom of His church and the King of kings, and we will share in His glory (Phil. 3:20-21; 1 John 3:2-3). In anticipation of our glorification we must now be

prepared for the coming life in heaven by being pure and holy. Our present spiritual state determines our future position. Apart from being born again, we must live Spirit-filled lives of dedication to the Lord. We will receive rewards at the judgement seat of Christ for our labour in the Lord (2 Cor. 5:10).

Personal commitment

I am filled with gratitude because the Lord saved my soul by grace and entered my name in the Book of Life. I am amazed at the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Salvation is only the beginning of the path of sanctification and service in the kingdom of heaven. I dedicate myself completely to this calling. May my life be a clean vessel through which the light of Christ can shine in a dark world. The supreme aim of my life is to be a dedicated disciple of the Lord Jesus, who will never cease to proclaim His praises. What a joy to know that if I am moving along on the path of my calling the Lord Jesus will be with me always, even to the end of the age.

Questions

1. What is the calling of God to sinners?
2. Explain the need for sorrow over sin.
3. What does it mean to be born again?
4. Why should we live holy lives?
5. What is the glorification that the Lord promised to us?

8. Sanctification

The justification of a believer during repentance should lead to a definite experience of sanctification in the lives of all Christians. The need for this experience is clearly stated in the Bible. When this need is properly understood, the solution of self-denial and filling with the Holy Spirit will be recognised and diligently sought after by more Christians.

Sanctification as a second work of grace after justification is an essential experience. A lack of this accounts for a life in which the old nature – although put off in principle – is not crucified in practice and the person therefore not yet filled with the Holy Spirit. In consequence, the works of the old nature (the flesh) will remain dominant in his life. They will manifest in dispositions such as selfishness, spiritual arrogance and feelings of superiority, materialism, love of the world, criticism and condemnation of other believers, a lack of spiritual fruit, wrong priorities, and an inconsistent spiritual life. The following are some of the clearest Biblical statements on the need for sanctification, focusing from different angles on the same problem and offering the same solution:

Self-consciousness in the disciples' lives. The disciples showed a very real need to be filled with the Holy Spirit because they were full of themselves (Matt. 20:27-28; Luke 22:24-26). They wrongly presumed that they could remain true to Jesus in their own strength (Matt. 26:33-35).

The absence of spiritual fruit. A further indication of the need for sanctification is the absence of spiritual fruit in a person's life. Such a person can be likened to a tree which is alive but not bearing any fruit, and therefore does not fulfil the expectations of its owner (Matt. 3:8; John 15:2).

The need for the power of the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus commanded the disciples not to start with their commission of evangelisation before they were endued with power from on high (Luke 24:49). That would be the much-needed spiritual equipment for their task (Acts 1:8).

New fillings. After the first experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit there often arises, as a result of crises in your life, a need for renewed fillings with the Holy Spirit in which the Lord touch, strengthen, encourage and equip you to meet new challenges (Acts 4:29-31; 13:50-52).

Victory over temptations. We are instructed to watch and to pray always. In this way we will continuously abide in Christ en He in us. We are challenged to live dedicated lives and to prevail over temptations and weaknesses (Matt. 26:41).

A new attitude to sin and righteousness. Sanctification demands a clear disposition against sin and in favour of God's righteousness (Rom. 6:11,22). We must always guard against conformity to the world, but rather be holy and acceptable to God at all times (Rom. 12:1-2).

The paralysing effect of being fleshly. A carnal attitude has a paralysing effect on Christians by eliminating any possibility for spiritual growth (1 Cor. 3:1-3; Gal. 5:17). Without self-denial and the taking up of the cross people will not grow out of this state of carnality of their own accord.

The obstacle of the old man. The reason why Christians do not spontaneously grow up to spiritual maturity and victory over sin, is because of the obstacle of the old man – the Adamic nature which is inclined to sin and must first be mortified by crucifixion (Eph 4:22-24; Rom. 6:6).

The ongoing mortification of the carnal mind. The carnal mind is in enmity against God and cannot subject itself to the laws of God (Rom. 8:7). There is only one way out of this inner conflict and that is the crucifixion of the old, fleshly nature (Rom. 8:13; Gal. 6:14).

Spiritual immaturity. The phenomenon of spiritual immaturity among children of the Lord strongly emphasises the need for sanctification and growth. Without this, a person is unfit for service and lacks spiritual discernment (Eph. 4:13-14; Heb. 5:12–6:1).

The need for a second work of grace. The second work of grace is in connection with a holy life and follows on the first work of grace which refers to your initial cleansing during rebirth. Jesus Christ gave Himself to cleanse *and* sanctify you (Eph. 5:25-27).

The Spirit-controlled life. This life becomes a reality when we renounce all domination by sin and self-centredness in our lives and surrender our whole being, body soul and spirit, to the full control of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16).

Striving towards perfection. We are not perfect, but in a process of greater perfection. For this objective to be realised we need to consciously put off the old life, and striving daily to live a life conforming to that of the resurrected Lord Jesus (Phil. 3:7-12).

The Christ-like life. We are called to walk just like Jesus walked (1 John 2:26; 1 Pet. 2:21). We will only be able to follow in His footsteps if the Holy Spirit helps us to put on the Lord Jesus Christ and to make no provision for the flesh to fulfil its lusts (Rom. 13:14).

A life according to heavenly principles. In the light of our heavenly citizenship (Phil. 3:20) we must live holy in this evil and sinful world (1 Thess. 2:10-12; Heb. 12:14). We must now be prepared to meet the Lord Jesus face to face (1 John 3:3).

A completely changed life. In a process of sanctification after our conversion we must proceed to put off all the remaining aspects of the old life, while putting on the new life to an ever-fuller extent. That is our clear calling (Col. 3:8-14).

The need for complete sanctification. After the initial cleansing of our sins during repentance we definitely still need to be filled with the Holy Spirit in order to be sanctified completely (1 Thess. 5:23-24). We must be blameless in holiness before God (1 Thess. 3:13).

The abandoning of worldly desires. The grace of the Lord that was bestowed on us during justification, teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly while always expecting the Second Coming of Christ (Titus 2:11-13).

Motivation for a holy life. Our motivation for holiness springs from the character and will of God Himself, who called us out of darkness into His marvellous light (1 Pet. 1:15; 1 Thess. 4:3,7-8). We have to lay aside all guile, hypocrisy, envy and evil speaking (1 Pet. 2:1-2).

The stumbling-block of the world. Compromise with the world and its evil lifestyles and institutions amounts to spiritual unfaithfulness to the Lord (Jas. 4:4). The world and its principles must be denied and we should only glory in the cross of Jesus Christ (Gal. 6:14).

The rule of victory over sin. The basic rule of the Christian's life in this world is that he must remain faithful to the Lord by not sinning. If he does sin he becomes spiritually defiled. The sins of Christians can be forgiven but should rather be averted (1 John 2:1).

The works as a proof of faith. A surrender towards sanctification puts us in the right spiritual frame of mind to bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives. These works render proof of our faith in the Lord Jesus and are not optional extras in our lives – they are essential (Jas. 2:14,26).

More holiness. Sanctification is a dynamic process that needs to grow in its intensity and extent. We must continually grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:18), and therefore also in the perfection of our holiness (2 Cor. 7:1; Rev. 22:11).

Perseverance in sound doctrine. Sanctification demands perseverance in the sound doctrine, as well as the correction of the compromisers, backsliders and false teachers (2 Tim. 4:2-5). Those who wandered from the truth should return to Christ and His Word (Jas. 5:19).

Continuous admonition against backsliding. Doctrinal error leads to spiritual backsliding and moral depravity. Some people yield to the temptations of Satan and lose their convictions and principles. We should guard against this process (Heb. 3:12-13; Gal. 6:1; 1 Cor. 10:12).

A high calling on earth and in heaven

Paul says that we have a high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:11). It is important that, as Christians, we observe our calling on earth *and* in heaven. Through a process of sanctification we must fulfil our commission on earth, while at the same time being prepared for the meeting with the heavenly Bridegroom. In the present dispensation we are witnesses for Christ in a world that lies in the sway of the wicked one. We are ambassadors for Christ in a foreign kingdom. As called saints we should be worthy representatives of the kingdom of heaven here on earth (Phil. 2:15).

Right through our earthly life and the performing of our task here, our heavenly destination should motivate us towards greater holiness. It should give us courage and perseverance while we are doing our work as strangers and sojourners in a wicked world (Phil. 3:20-21). We need to sanctify ourselves in preparation for a future heavenly existence in close association with the Lord Jesus. We will have the same resurrected body as His and live in His holy presence (1 John 3:2-3).

Personal commitment

What inexpressible grace that the Holy Spirit was poured out to convict me of sin and to regenerate me, but also to fill and empower me to be an effective witness for Jesus in this dark world. I realise that the flesh must be crucified and always remain crucified so as not to regain its control over my life. I also realise that as a Spirit-filled Christian I still have human limitations and weaknesses, but I thank God that the Holy Spirit helps me in my weaknesses (Rom. 8:26). I am so privileged that the Holy Spirit helps me to put on the new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness. I trust Him for a deeper work of grace and lay down my whole life on the altar to be sanctified and set apart in the service of the Lord.

Questions

1. Explain the second work of grace after conversion
2. What is big stumbling-block to being filled with the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians?
3. In which way is sanctification related to spiritual maturity and serving the Lord?
4. How does the Lord prepare us for heaven?
5. Explain our two callings.

9. Prayer

Prayer is one of the most important Christian activities. Through sustained prayer you are practising a close walk with the Lord, which is foundational to success in other aspects of your Christian life. It also ensures victory in the struggle against the Evil One as, in faith, you commit yourself to the care and protection of the great Conqueror, Jesus Christ. Dr. Andrew Murray said: "I am sure that we will never fully realise what prayer is meant to be, as long as we mainly view it as a method to maintain our own Christian lives. If we learn to view it as the most important part of the work entrusted to us, the foundation and strength of all our work, then we will realise that there is nothing else that we should study and practise as the art of correct praying."

The request of the disciples was: "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). The art of true prayer and intercession can only be learnt from the Great Intercessor, Jesus Christ. It is a learning school in which we must also grow in grace and knowledge. Although prayer in its basic form is so simple that the smallest child can pray, it is also the highest form of dedication and divine service to which human beings are called.

Priestly work

As a holy priesthood, we must learn what it is to intercede with perseverance at the throne of grace for the salvation of souls (Luke 18:1). A priest only lives for the glory of God and the salvation of people. His prayers are not focussed on self-interest. In this regard we must learn from our High Priest: as Christ sacrificed Himself for us, we should also sacrifice ourselves in prayer for the spiritual interests of others.

The Holy Spirit and prayer

Guidance for prayer comes from the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:26). We must continuously submit ourselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit to control our thoughts, prayers and our whole life. Without this, we will not be able to pray the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man which avails much (Jas. 5:16).

Clarity of prayer requests

Prayer requests should be specific and clearly stated. The Lord Jesus asks: "What do you want Me to do for you?" (Mark. 10:36). Our prayer should not be vague and without purpose. Don't just pray general prayers that God must forgive your sins, but mention your sins and unrighteousness by their names (1 John 1:9). In your task as intercessor for others you should also guard against unspecified prayers for the salvation of souls, as well as requests that God must bless all people on earth. Such prayers are not focused on any specific country, community, family, individual or problem, hence you will not know where to look for the answer to your prayers.

Personal prayers

Every Christians must maintain a personal prayer relationship with the Lord Jesus. Take care that you have a time and place where you can talk to the Lord alone (Matt. 6:6). Personal prayer is a secret source of power in your life. When it is continuously practised the Lord Jesus will reward you in public. When you are among people and have to contend with temptations and attacks by adversaries, He will strengthen you spiritually by giving you victory in His Name. Your friends, family members and colleagues will notice that you have a level of self-control, calmness, trust, determination, sincerity and firmness of principle that only comes from the Lord.

Group prayers

A special blessing rests upon prayer meetings (Matt. 18:19-20). A child of the Lord not only has a need for secret prayers but also for public prayers with other believers. The same Spirit joins us together as members of the same body, and for that reason we must function together as a group and work together for the realisation of common objectives. From the Scripture quoted above, it is obvious that we should agree on a specific matter. The value of corporate prayer must be discovered and pursued in that every person should agree in his or her heart when another member of the group worships the Lord and makes prayer requests. A prayer meeting, therefore, does not comprise the aggregation of a number of individual prayers, but mutual participation in every prayer offered to the Lord.

The certainty of answers to prayer

The Lord Jesus Himself is the guarantor for prayers offered in His Name (John 14:13; cf. John 16:23; Matt. 7:7-8; Mark 11:24). Biblical promises on the answering of prayer are conditional and it is in the interest of each one of us to ensure that we study these conditions and comply to them:

Prayer requests must be aimed at glorifying the Father (John 14:13; Matt. 6:9-10). They must be in accordance with His will (1 John 5:14; Rom. 8:27). Our lives and desires should be in Christ, and His words in our hearts, to keep us from entertaining selfish motives (John. 15:7; Jas. 4:3). Prayers must be aimed at a life of purity and fruitful service to the Lord (1 Thess. 4:3,7; John 15:16). A holy life is a precondition for the answering of prayer (1 John 3:22). We are committed to forgive others when we pray for the forgiveness of sins to the Father (Mark 11:25-26). An unforgiving heart and bitterness will hinder the answering of our prayers. We must also pray in faith without doubting (Heb. 11:6; Jas. 1:6-8).

Themes of prayer

The following are biblical guidelines for prayer themes:

Worship. Praise the Lord for His greatness, goodness and compassion. Worship His Name and offer the reverence due to Him. Use verses from the Psalms for this purpose, e.g. Psalm 103.

Thanksgiving. Thank the Lord sincerely for everything that He has done for the salvation of fallen humanity, and also for you personally. Express your gratitude to Him for all the wonderful promises in His Word. He has promised never to leave or forsake you, to supply all your needs according to the riches of His grace, and to be with you always, even to the end of the age.

The needs of the saints. Pray for provision in the needs of the saints (Eph. 6:18). Pray for their protection against the attacks of Satan. Pray that the Lord will give to them open doors for the ministering of His Word, and also boldness in proclaiming the mystery of the gospel to a lost world (Eph. 6:19).

Your own needs. Make your needs known to the Lord through prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving for its fulfilment (Eph. 4:6). If you have sinned, confess it to the Lord (Ps. 51:3-17).

The salvation of souls. The salvation of sinners is the great purpose for which the Lord Jesus has come to the world (Luke 19:10), and we must earnestly pray for its realisation. Also pray that the Lord will send labourers into His harvest (Matt. 9:37-38).

Sanctification and revival. Sanctification is the will of God for all His children (1 Thess. 4:3; 1 Pet. 1:14-16). Pray for a holy and victorious life. Also pray for revival in backslidden churches and congregations (Rev. 2:4-5).

Healing. The Lord Jesus also wants to heal our bodily illnesses (Jas. 5:14). However, we live in a broken and perishing world in which Christians also become sick and suffer afflictions without this condition always having a relationship to sin. In some cases people are healed (Acts 28:9) and in some cases not (2 Cor. 12:7-10; 2 Tim. 4:20). The Lord can heal people directly, but often uses medical science for this purpose. We must be content with our condition after praying about it. Some people who have not been healed are still powerful witnesses to the Lord.

Power to overcome in the spiritual battle. Pray for victory in the battle against the flesh, the world, the devil and sin (Matt. 6:13; 26:41; Jas. 4:7).

The government. Pray for the salvation of your heads of government and their subordinates (1 Tim. 2:1-4). From this Scripture it is evident that we need not pray for blessings upon a godless government but for the saving of their souls, and that the Lord will keep them from creating unbearable conditions for their subjects. The Lord can change any leader's evil counsel and cause him to make decisions that are in accordance with His will and the prayers of His children (Prov. 21:1).

Israel's salvation and the peace of Jerusalem. Pray for the physical *and* spiritual restoration of Israel (Ezek. 36:22-27). We must also pray for the peace of Jerusalem because the attacks of the enemy are particularly aimed at this city (Ps. 122:6; cf. Isa. 62:6-7; Rom. 11:25-26).

Rain and material blessings. God gives rain (Jer. 14:22; Zech 10:1), and also withholds it if a people lapse into sin and rebellion (Jer. 3:2-3). When supplication for rain is offered it should be attended by personal, congregational and national repentance.

The Second Coming and the Millennium. It should be the prayer and desire of every believer that Jesus Christ will come again soon to reveal and establish His government of righteousness on earth (Matt. 6:10; Acts 15:16-17; Rev. 11:15). Jerusalem will then be the capital of the world and Satan will be bound (Isa. 2:2-4; Jer. 3:17; Zech. 8:20-22; Rev. 20:2-4).

Warning against false prayers

We are warned against false prayers which are prayed with a wrong motif of self-enrichment and pleasure (Jas. 4:3), as well as heathen prayers which consist of a vain repetition of words (Matt. 6:7). Meditation and the use of mantras is also a heathen form of prayer that must not be practised. These "silent prayers" are referred to as "contemplative prayers."

Personal commitment

Praise be to God that we don't have to serve and worship Him through the mediation of priests but that each one of us can draw near to the throne of grace in prayer. I am filled with joy for this new and living way which the Lord Jesus, by His death on the cross, has consecrated to me through the torn veil (Heb. 10:19-20). I commit myself to draw near to Him on this way, to mention my requests and desires before the throne of the Lord, and to offer the gratitude and praises of my heart to Him. I thank Him for the privilege to pray with all supplication in the Spirit (Eph. 6:18), and that He is a very present help in trouble (Ps. 46:1; 65:2). He invites all who labour and are heavy laden to come to Him (Matt. 11:28) for answers to prayer, for rest with Him and also for grace and power to fight the good fight of faith (1 Tim. 6:12).

Questions

1. Explain the importance of prayer.
2. What is the nature of personal prayers?
3. What is the relationship between God's will and answers to prayer?
4. Name and discuss five themes of prayer.
5. How should we intercede for governments?

10. Discipleship

Discipleship involves much more than salvation – it also involves the spiritual training and equipping of believers to be worthy disciples who can serve the Lord Jesus and execute the Great Commission of evangelising the world. Their main mission is to lead other people to Christ and to make disciples of them. All believers are called to become disciples and to commit themselves wholeheartedly to making disciples of converts from all peoples and nations (Matt. 28:19).

Surrender to discipleship

During the training of His disciples the Lord Jesus clearly stated the basic conditions for discipleship to them (Luke 9:23-26). There are four verbs in Luke 9:23, indicating certain actions that must be taken: “If any *man* **will come** after Me, let him **deny** himself, and **take up** his cross daily, and **follow** Me” (KJV). There must first be an act of volition by the prospective disciple to follow the Lord Jesus; then he must deny himself, identify with the cross of Jesus by dying to the world, and then follow Him in evangelising the world.

As is the case with salvation (Rev. 22:17), every believer must have the desire, or will, to pursue sanctification and discipleship. If so, then self-denial is the following step. The lust of the flesh and the world must be put off if you wish to follow Christ with an undivided heart. There is only one way of doing this, and that is to surrender yourself completely to the guidance of the Holy Spirit while you glory in the cross of Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to you, and you to the world (Gal. 6:14). The taking up of the cross must be a daily act of surrender. Should you stop doing it, the flesh will be released from its crucified position and gradually starts manifesting itself again in your life. That will be a foolish thing to do, as spiritual backsliding will be the inevitable consequence (Gal. 3:1,3). In the final part of the Scripture in Luke 9:23 the Lord Jesus says that we must follow Him. Through Bible study and the acceptance of the Lord’s guidance you will continue to follow Him and thus to fulfil your calling as a disciple. If you are within the will of the Lord, every stumbling-block will be removed and your way made straight.

The spiritual equipment for discipleship

After the disciples were taught by the Lord and had accepted the conditions for discipleship, they still had to be filled with the Holy Spirit before they could be witnesses of Christ and start working for Him (Luke 24:45-49; Acts 1:8). The Lord does the work of sanctification after His disciples humbled themselves and put off the lusts of the flesh and the world. The first disciples received this blessing on the day of Pentecost. After they were endued with the power of the Holy Spirit, they proclaimed the gospel with boldness. The day when Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit, “straightaway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God” (Acts 9:20 KJV). Afterwards, the disciples often had new experiences of being filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:31; 13:52). That is a life of deep dependence on the Lord (John 15:5).

Continued self-denial

The disciple’s daily life and ministry should always be in terms of the principle of the cross. That calls for continued self-denial to prevent the flesh from regaining its influence and domination. The disciple must not please himself but bear the scruples of the weak (Rom. 15:1). He must be long-suffering in the face of criticism and opposition, and not become discouraged (Heb. 12:3). He must not enforce his own opinion on others but have a teachable spirit and always bow before the authority of the Word (Ps. 119:59). Self-denial also demands faithful service to the Lord, which is contrary to a life of self-gratification and covetousness (Ps. 119:36).

Persecution

Disciples of Christ must be prepared to be persecuted for their faith (John 15:18-21). We are followers of the suffering Messiah who was rejected by the world, and for that reason the world hates us (John 16:33). The early disciples experienced tremendous persecution and encouraged one another by saying: "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Paul said: "For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Phil. 1:29). Our light affliction which is but for moment, does not compare with the eternal weight of glory which will be revealed to us at the Second Coming of Christ (2 Cor. 4:17). When the Lord Jesus returns, we will share in His glory and be co-rulers with Him (Rom. 8:17; 2 Tim. 2:12). Then, our days of suffering will be over (Rev. 21:4).

The responsibility of disciples

In discipleship there is a clear indication of collaboration from two sides: The Lord gives the power, but you have the obligation to walk worthy before Him while making plans to use the divine power entrusted to you. It will not be converted into works without your active collaboration. We need to actively and purposefully present our bodies as instruments of righteousness in the service of the Lord (Rom. 6:13). The following commands are relevant in this regard: Our bodies should be presented as holy and acceptable sacrifices in the service of God (Rom. 12:1-2; 6:22) and bear fruit that befits repentance (Matt. 3:8). We have been sent (John 20:21) to preach the Word in season and out of season (2 Tim. 4:2).

In the execution of these and many other commands we must always remember that it is the power of the Lord that works through our weak bodies. The honour and glory for what is achieved belongs to Him alone. For all that Paul has achieved in his life of service he honoured God who graciously enabled him to do these works (1 Cor. 15:10). He realised that without the grace of the Lord he would not be able to do anything. Nevertheless, as a fellow worker of God, he had to exert himself actively in the service of the One who has sent him (1 Cor. 9:27).

May the Lord give to each of us grace to realise our high calling in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:14). He does not only call us out of darkness into His marvellous light but also wants to make us Spirit-filled disciples of Himself – vessels that can be used of Him in the extension of His kingdom. Are you prepared to be equipped for this call? Then humble yourself before Him and wait on the Lord until He endues you with power from on high.

The privileges of disciples

- They are recognised by Jesus Christ and He intimately associates with them (Matt. 12:49-50).
- Christ is the light of their lives so they never have to walk in darkness (John 8:12).
- The Holy Spirit guides them into the whole truth of God and His Word (John 16:13).
- They are filled with the love of Jesus Christ to such an extent that the world can see that they are His disciples (John 13:34-35).
- They are honoured by the Father because they serve Christ and promote the interests of His kingdom on earth (John 12:26).

Failed disciples

What happens to believers who do not comply with the conditions for discipleship? They disqualify themselves as disciples (Luke 14:27). A person who has not yet surrendered himself in this way is full of himself, of *his* plans and *his* ideas. He proclaims his own convictions and promotes the cause of *his* church or organisation, in which the kingdom of Christ is not necessarily the first priority. He wants recognition for everything he does and sounds a trumpet before him to announce all his good deeds (Matt. 6:2). Before they were filled with the Holy Spirit, the disciples were also full of themselves and wondered who of them were the greatest in the kingdom of God (Matt. 20:25-28). The flesh always wants to stand in front of the row to be seen by everybody. The fleshly person is bitterly disappointed when his reputation is injured. In his heart he despises and rejects all those who do not honour and elevate him as somebody special.

Why is such a person with an uncrucified, fleshly nature unfit for the service of the Lord? Because he experiences an inner conflict which obstructs true Christian service (Gal. 5:17). Christians who still live under the domination of the flesh, like those in 1 Corinthians 3:1-3, are self-centred, full of envy, strife and divisions, and because of their spiritual immaturity unfit to be used as disciples. When they do proclaim the Word in this state of mind, it is not done in demonstration of the Spirit and of power but in persuasive words of human wisdom (1 Cor. 2:4). That is a futile exercise as such words cannot convict people of their sin but only flatter their vanity (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

It is a common phenomenon of our time that people with carnal objectives exploit the Christian religion for their own selfish ideals. They are intent on enriching themselves, they strive after the honour of people and pose as great spiritual leaders. The devil helps such people in their carnal, worldly campaign because they deceive thousands of other people, sidetrack them spiritually and even drag them to hell. During the earthly ministry of Jesus, people shied away from true discipleship for other reasons. In those times it was not popular and socially acceptable to call yourself a follower of Jesus. Messianic Jews were persecuted and even disinherited by their parents. Their reputation and financial security were in jeopardy, which explains the high price that was due for discipleship (Luke 9:24-25). Whatever our circumstances, there is always a price to be paid to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. I must be prepared to sacrifice social esteem and rights while my self-interest should also die.

Personal commitment

What a privilege to be a disciple of Jesus Christ! Although it is a demanding way on which we must shine as lights in the midst of a crooked generation, it is a great joy to be a blessing to others. If we persevere on this way to the end, our reward in the kingdom of Christ will be wonderful. I dedicate myself anew to the high calling of discipleship, and pray for grace to take up the cross every day, by whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the word, and to run with endurance the race that is set before me (Gal. 6:14; Heb. 12:1). I am not in this world to please myself, but to please Him who enlisted me as a soldier (2 Tim. 2:4). On the road of world evangelism we have the most wonderful promises of the daily presence of the Lord Jesus (Matt. 28:20). Soon the great harvest of His kingdom will have been gathered, then we will rejoice for every saved soul.

Questions

1. What are the requirements for discipleship?
2. What is the nature of the disciple's dependence on the Holy Spirit?

3. Describe the role of persecution in the disciple's life.
4. Name three of the privileges of disciples.
5. What are the characteristics of failed disciples?

11. The Assembly

The assembly (or church) of Christ is described as His body, of which every born again Christian is a member (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12-13; Eph. 1:22-23, 2:16, 3:6, 4:12,16, 5:23; Col. 1:18,24). This intimate relationship with Jesus Christ is based on the fact that the assembly is saved (Eph. 5:25-27), purchased (Acts 20:28), sanctified (Eph. 5:26-27), established (Eph. 2:19-20), built (Matt. 16:18), loved (Eph. 5:25) and owned by Him (Rom. 7:4).

On the local level, the assembly of Christ is mostly represented by small assemblies (also referred to as congregations) that achieve their objectives not by power or by might but by the work of God's Spirit. The true assembly should guard against human falsifications and alliances with the world by remaining true to its calling and commission. The following are the eight most important characteristics of the assembly. Individual Christians should demonstrate these characteristics to their fullest potential and in their purest form in order that the assembly is built up spiritually, sinners are saved, new assemblies are established and spiritual deception by ignorant people and false prophets is resisted.

1. The called out ones

The New Testament term for the assembly, or church, of Christ is the *ecclesia* – which literally means “the called out ones.” It refers to those who have been called from the darkness of sin and spiritual lostness to the marvellous light of Christ (1 Pet. 2:9). Through spiritual regeneration, God made them new people (John 3:3). The true assembly of Christ is, therefore, only composed of born again Christians. To be regarded as members of the assembly of Christ, they must be able to testify spontaneously and frankly of their changed lives. The observing of this principle of membership is clearly evident from Acts 2:47 – only saved people are added to the assembly of Christ. One first has to confess your sins to the Lord Jesus (1 John 1:9) and put your faith in Him as your Saviour (Acts 16:31) so He can make you spiritually alive (John 5:24). Only then will you belong to Him and be a member of His body, or assembly, on earth.

Many people never confess their sins honestly and therefore do not thoroughly repent of their sins. In their unsaved state they join Christian assemblies, but from a biblical point of view they do not belong to the assembly of Christ. They are nominal believers who only have a form of godliness (2 Tim. 3:5; Titus 1:16; Rev. 3:1). The Lord will reject these nominal believers when they appear before His throne – even though they belonged to denominations and may even have preached in His Name (Matt. 7:21-23). Serious strife and dissension can prevail in assemblies if “false brothers” (2 Cor. 11:26) sneak in and pretend to be believers, while in reality they are still totally dominated by their carnal nature.

2. The temple of the Holy Spirit

The assembly of Christ is commanded to live holy, Spirit-filled lives. They must put off the old man and put on the new man (Eph. 4:22-24; 1 Thess. 5:22-24). Members of the assembly of Christ must fully realise that the Holy Spirit was not only poured out to convict them of their sins and to

regenerate them spiritually – they are also called to be a temple of the Holy Spirit and to live lives that will glorify God (1 Cor. 6:19-20). The Holy Spirit wishes to fill and enable them to achieve victory over sin, temptations and the flesh (Gal. 5:16), and also empower them to render service in the kingdom of God (Acts 1:8; Eph. 5:18).

3. The body of Christ

By being born again we are baptised into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). The body of Christ can be likened to an organic body in which the various members supplement one another (Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:12-31). In association with other members you can put your talents and gifts to use in the extension of God's kingdom (1 Pet. 4:10). The local assembly must aim to be a worthy reflection and representative of the corporate body of Christ. Fulfil your calling and task only in the power and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, as we cannot please God when doing things in the power of the flesh. The authority for your calling in the assembly is only vested in Christ, while the Holy Spirit endues you with power to execute it. In this position of dependence on Him alone, victory is assured as the Lord Jesus is our Head who calls, empowers, guides and sends us (Eph. 1:17-23).

4. The little flock

God's kingdom is revealed by the little flock of His assembly (Luke 12:32). The followers of Christ are like a flock of sheep that are led and cared for by the Good Shepherd. They are deeply dependent on Him to lead them to green pastures, to protect them against dangers and to guide them through every crisis and challenging situation (Ps. 23:1-4). The Shepherd knows His sheep, supplies in their needs and knows to deliver them from all anxiety and evil – even from the devil himself (Matt. 6:13; John 10:14-15). The Chief Shepherd also appointed overseers to take responsibility for the care of His flock (Acts 20:28).

5. 'n Pillar and ground of the truth

The assembly of the living God is "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). It must be a clear feature of the assembly of Christ that it maintains and preaches the biblical doctrine on salvation, thereby ensuring that the members are not deceived. For this reason it is imperative that the assembly also has an apologetic ministry in which the pure Christian doctrine is defended against wrong teachings. The pastor has a responsibility to inform members on sects and to enable them to refute all forms of spiritual deception from the Word of God (Jude 1:3-4). The truth of the Word can set people free from the power of delusion (John 8:32), and in its full light every heresy will be exposed.

6. Disciples of Christ

All members of the assembly must dedicate themselves to attain the standard set for disciples of Christ, as that is the only way to be worthy representatives of God's kingdom on earth. The Lord Jesus has called (Matt. 4:19), instructed (Matt. 28:19; John 14:26), equipped (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8) and sent (Matt. 28:19; Luke 10:3; John 20:21) His disciples. The call to discipleship renders the assembly an active, out-going group which is committed to evangelising the non-Christian world. Wherever new groups of believers are formed, new assemblies should be established – even if they assemble in the houses of believers. During their meetings, believers must be trained to become disciples who can preach the Word themselves. In this way, the kingdom of God on earth will be extended.

7. The bride of the Lamb

The assembly is the bride of the Lamb. Through a process of sanctification we are prepared to be presented to the heavenly Bridegroom in a worthy way, without spot or wrinkle (Eph. 5:26-27). Sanctification, which is a vitally important preparation for our appearance before Christ, entails two different aspects. The first one is personal holiness. We must have no vile and sinful habits which can defile us in our spirit, soul or body (2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Thess. 5:23-24). Secondly, we must do works which will please the Lord as “holiness” can also be translated as “separated for the service of the Lord.” There must be works in our lives which are the fruit of the Holy Spirit who works through us. These works in the lives of truly dedicated Christians will also ensure that they have a proper wedding garment (Rev. 19:7-8; see also Ps. 45:9,13-15).

8. The light of the world

We are called to be the light of the world (Matt. 5:14-16). God’s assembly must be like a lamp which shines brightly in the midst of spiritual darkness. We represent His kingdom in a sinful world which lies in the sway of the Wicked One (1 John 5:19). We should, under no circumstances whatsoever, make any compromise with the crooked ways of the world, but walk strictly in accordance with the Word of God, that we may be blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom we shine as lights in the world (Phil. 2:15). If we walk in the light of God’s presence, then His light will shine through us and onto the world around us. Make sure that you stay close to the Lord and that your feet are anchored in His Word. The psalmist says: “The entrance of Your words give light” (Ps. 119:130). We know what the source of light is, namely the Lord Jesus and His Word, and we are commissioned to let this light shine in the world. Should we fail to be the light of a dark world and the salt of a corrupt earth, the world will deteriorate faster and be totally overcome by evil. God wants to reveal Himself and His assembly to the world, and we are commanded to do it. Are you busy doing so?

Personal commitment

It is a thrilling and challenging thought that we can be the members of Christ’s body on earth. It should motivate us to rise to higher levels of sanctification, purity and willingness to serve the Lord. We must always keep in mind that Jesus Christ is the Head of the assembly, and that His place cannot be taken up by a human office-bearer. May we never backslide to the level of the church in Ephesus, to whom Christ said: “I have this against you, that you have left your first love” (Eph. 2:4). May we rather accept the challenge to be like the church in Philadelphia who kept the Lord’s Word and did not deny His Name (Rev. 3:8). Let us “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3). I dedicate myself to the cause of serving “the pure milk of the word” to people (1 Pet. 2:2), always refraining from teaching the commandments of men (Mark 7:9,13). It is also the responsibility of all of us to train more disciples so that the gospel of salvation may have free course to the unsaved (2 Thess. 3:1).

Questions

1. Who and what are the called out ones?
2. Is a denomination necessarily part of the body of Christ?
3. What is the body of Christ and how does it function?
4. Describe the assembly as the bride of Christ.

5. How can the assembly be the light of the world?

12. Israel

Israel is of great significance to all the people of the world because the words of God were entrusted to them (Rom. 3:1-2). According to Romans 11:11-15, Israel is a blessing to the nations during their spiritually blinded state, and will be an even greater blessing to the world after their spiritual restoration. Because they are used as an example to warn us against disobeying God (1 Cor. 10:1-12), it is important that we pay close attention to them.

Calling, dispersion and restoration

A large part of the Bible deals with Israel. In a very special sense they are the chosen people of God. He called them to be a holy people and led them to the Promised Land; He then dispersed them among the nations because of their disobedience; and it is the same immutable covenant God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who is restoring Israel to the land of their fathers in the end-time.

Calling and establishment in their land. The calling of Israel started with Abraham, who is the progenitor of Israel (Gen. 12:1-3; 13:14-15). The promise of the land was later confirmed to Isaac and Jacob (Gen. 26:3; 28:13). Before inheriting the Promised Land, the descendants of the founding patriarchs first spent 400 years as strangers in Egypt, where they became the slaves of the Egyptians (Gen. 15:13-14). Under the leadership of Moses and Joshua they were led out of Egypt to take possession of the land, which the Lord had promised to their fathers. This was their establishment in the land.

Dispersion. The Lord set a clear spiritual standard to Israel for the privilege of being called a people of God. Should they continuously fail to meet this standard, they would invite the displeasure and even the anger of God against them. Extended periods of national disobedience resulted in God surrendering Israel to their enemies. Through experiences such as this they learned the hard way the consequences of straying from God. After they had humbled themselves before the Lord and confessed their sins, He again restored them to their land (Lev. 26; Deut. 30). The Babylonian captivity of Israel, which was confined to one area, was obviously not the international Diaspora to all nations. The Diaspora only occurred in the first century AD, and was finally announced by Jesus after He was rejected as Messiah by Israel (Matt. 23:37-38; Luke 21:20-24). The siege and destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70 was the start of the long international dispersion of Israel that lasted for almost two millennia. At some time during the Diaspora there have been Jewish exiles in all countries of the world.

Restoration. Never in all of Israel's existence as a nation was there ever the slightest doubt of the validity of the unconditional promises that God made to the founding fathers of the nation (Lev. 26:44-45). Even if Israel is unfaithful, God remains a faithful covenant-keeping God who will again restore the nation to their land (Rom. 3:3-4). The restoration of Israel from their international dispersion has led to the establishment of the modern Jewish state in May 1948. The final objective with Israel's physical restoration in the land of their fathers is their spiritual restoration (Ezek. 36:22-28). For this to be realised there will have to be a spiritual testing and purification after they have been gathered in their land. That will be a time of great affliction and tribulation (Ezek. 22:19-20; Jer. 30:7; Matt. 24:15-22). Only a remnant of the nation will be saved (Rom. 9:27) since the majority of them (as is the case among all nations) are spiritually hardened and unrepentant.

Jerusalem

Jerusalem is the only city in the world which was chosen by God to put His name there forever (1 Kings 9:3; 11:36). In Old Testament times the temple, as the house of the Lord, was built in Jerusalem. However, the greatest revelation of God to Israel *and* all of humanity was the coming of His Son, Jesus, to the world (Isa. 9:6-7; 49:6). In Jerusalem, that unique city of divine revelation, the Lord Jesus proclaimed the message of eternal life. He also taught in the temple. But the majority of the city's inhabitants rejected the Messiah as well as His teachings. In so doing, they brought great peril upon themselves. During His entrance into Jerusalem on a colt Jesus wept over the city and its blinded inhabitants who rejected their Messiah-King to their own detriment and ruin (Luke 19:41-44).

The Lord Jesus was crucified on Golgotha just outside Jerusalem in the stone-quarry of Solomon. Here, He made atonement for our sins by paying the price for the transgressions of a lost humanity to God. Calvary will forever stand out as the expression of God's condescending love and forgivingness, and as the only door to eternal life. There is no other name under the heaven given to us whereby we must be saved – only Jesus Christ and Him crucified (Acts 4:12).

Jesus was buried outside the gates of Jerusalem but rose from the dead three days later. Forty days after His resurrection Jesus ascended to heaven from the Mount of Olives. Just prior to His ascension He gave the Great Commission to His disciples. That ministry would only commence after something very important had happened in Jerusalem, which was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8). The day when that happened was the birthday of the church of Christ in Jerusalem.

Many people wrongly argue that the divine purpose of Jerusalem was terminated when the disciples moved out of the city to preach the gospel in the rest of the world. What about God's decision that His name would forever dwell in Jerusalem? Was that decision rescinded when Israel rejected Jesus and crucified Him? Not at all! The long-term future of Jerusalem was always, and still is, securely fixed in the divine counsel and purposes of God. The Lord Jesus told the Jews that Jerusalem would be destroyed and its inhabitants scattered across the world until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled – i.e. until the end of the church dispensation (Matt. 23:37-39; Luke 21:20-24). After their international Diaspora and physical restoration they will also be spiritually revived (Rom. 11:25-26). Biblical Jerusalem (the Old City) was recaptured from Jordan in June 1967 and declared to be Israel's capital city in August 1980. That event ushered in the last generation of this dispensation.

The last seven years of the last generation are described as the 70th year-week of Daniel (Dan. 9:24-27) when Israel will, to their virtual destruction, conclude a covenant with the false messiah (John. 5:43). They will revoke their covenant with him when he declares himself to be God in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem after 3½ years (2 Thess. 2:4). At the end of the tribulation period, when the true Messiah sets foot on the Mount of Olives during His Second Coming (Zech. 14:5), the remnant of Israel will look on Him whom they have pierced (Zech. 12:10) and be spiritually reconciled to Him (Zech. 13:1). They will reverently greet Him by exclaiming: "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" (Matt. 23:39).

The Messiah will restore the throne of David in Jerusalem, thereby fulfilling a prophecy in Luke 1:32. The Messianic reign of peace will then commence with Jerusalem as capital of the world (Isa. 2:2-4; Jer. 3:17). That will introduce a time of great glory for Jerusalem and the redeemed Jewish nation (Zech. 8:22-23; Isa. 33:20-22; 52:1; 60:3,11-12,14,18; Jer. 31:31-34).

In view of the wonderful future of Jerusalem we must earnestly pray for this city (Ps. 122:6; Isa. 62:6-7). Fervent prayers are needed because the enemies of God, of Israel *and* of Christianity will

do everything in their power to drive Israel from their land and also to fight the Messiah when He comes to Jerusalem. On that day, the Lord will enter into judgement with the wicked world powers that will be deployed in Israel under the leadership of the Antichrist (Zech. 14:2-3,12-13, Joel 3:1-2; Rev. 19:19-21). In their relentless efforts to make room for a Palestinian state, the nations are undermining the rights of Israel, while also disregarding the decrees of God, by trying to divide the land that God gave to Israel (Joel 3:2). In this way, a stronghold is created for Israel's enemies in their midst, thereby violating the divine mandate which Israel holds on the land.

Attitudes towards Israel

There are widely diverging attitudes among the nations towards Israel. This is a very important matter, since the judgements of God have been pronounced upon the enemies of Israel and His blessings upon those who support and bless them (Gen. 12:3). If we wish to be blessed by God we must bless Israel. Do not rush to condemn them because they crucified Jesus – remember Gentiles participated! It was indeed a wicked act of unbelief, but it was part of God's plan of salvation for Israel *and* the nations. If the atoning death of the Lord Jesus had not taken place, you and I could not have been reconciled to God, nor become Christians.

Because Israel has rejected and crucified the Messiah, salvation has come to the non-Jewish nations. In their fallen state, Israel is a source of great blessings to us (Rom. 11:11-12). God says that in their spiritually restored state, during the Messiah's coming reign of peace, they will even be a greater blessing to the world (Zech. 8:23). Christians owe a debt of gratitude, recognition, blessing, intercession, and support to Israel. They must be provoked to jealousy by our worshipping and serving *their* God, Yahweh Elohim, through *their* Messiah, Yeshua! Witnessing of this kind has already given rise to a small but significant increase in the number of Messianic Jews. The future of Israel is in the hands of those Jews who accepted, confess and serve Jesus Christ (Yeshua Ha Mashiach).

Personal commitment

What a privilege to bless Israel and witness of the Messiah to them! The Lord has promised to restore Israel to their land (Jer. 31:10), to revive a remnant of them spiritually (Ezek. 36:25-27), to establish Jerusalem and to rule the world from this city (Jer. 3:17). While the wicked nations of the world, in their foolishness, conspire together to destroy Jerusalem (Ps. 83:2-4; Zech. 12:3), we commit ourselves to bless the city and its inhabitants by proclaiming the promises that the Messiah made about this nation and their capital city, Jerusalem (Isa. 62:6-7; Jer. 31:38; Matt. 23:39). The Messiah is the Holy One of Israel, and the Jews will have no rest, prosperity or peace until they are reconciled to Him – He is their only hope.

Questions

1. Mention two biblical promises on the end-time restoration of Israel.
2. Mention three important future events that will happen in Jerusalem.
3. What should our attitude be towards the unsaved Jewish people?
4. What does the Bible say about the nations that harm, persecute and fight Israel?
5. Who gave Israel's land to them, and when did that happen?

13. Spiritual Deception

Why are there so many Christian churches and sects in the world who deviate doctrinally in a lesser or greater degree from the Bible, while in some cases completely denying the truth? It emanates from ignorance and deception, and this phenomenon is further increasing in extent. In view of these problems we need more than ever to expand our knowledge of the Word of God, to deepen our spiritual understanding, to raise the level of our dedication to the Lord Jesus, and to sharpen our vigilance against the deception of Satan and his false prophets. Falsifications of the Christian faith are proliferating in the end-time in preparation of the coming of the false Christ and the false prophet, who will deceive the world with their lies (Matt. 24:4-5; 2 Thess. 2:6-10; Rev. 13:11-14).

Although spiritual deception started in the Garden of Eden and continued unabated throughout the centuries, it is now taking on the greatest proportions in the entire history of mankind. It is of the greatest importance that every person ensures that he or she has not been deceived because there are many false prophets in the world (1 John 4:1).

Since the start of the Christian era, many churches have shown a fatal inability to distinguish between the truth of God's inspired Word and misrepresentations of it (Gal. 1:6-8; 2 Cor. 11:2-4). From the last-mentioned Scripture it is evident that there are three main ways in which the truth of Scripture can be distorted by Satan to deceive Christians and lead them astray. These perversions involve crucial issues which lie at the very core of our faith and are intended to deceive people into accepting **another Jesus, another spirit, and another gospel.**

Another Jesus

The following are the seven most common ways in which the Person, work and image of the Lord Jesus are distorted so as to present a counterfeit Jesus who is powerless to save lost sinners from the righteous judgements of a holy God:

Jesus the human teacher. In sects such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and in other religions such as Islam, the deity of Jesus is denied. They portray Him merely as a human prophet or a gifted teacher, while explicitly denying that He is the Son of God (1 John. 2:22-23). In various theological seminaries the deity and virgin birth of the Lord Jesus are also denied.

Jesus the example. Preaching in many of the formal and spiritually dead churches often presents the life of Jesus merely as an ideal example we should follow. In such moralistic sermons, no reference is made to His atoning death and shed blood which alone can cleanse from sin. Instead of the need for new birth, Christian virtues are taught, *without* the risen Christ who alone can enable us to "walk in the newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). People are not saved under moralising preaching of this nature – they are only intellectually and emotionally motivated.

Jesus the giver of gifts. Many people are attracted to Jesus because they feel they can derive various benefits from Him. He should heal them, bless them, prosper them and provide for all their material needs. They want to rule as kings in His kingdom *now*.

Jesus the political liberator. A Jesus who is a freedom fighter and who champions the oppressed is often proclaimed in the Third World. He came to set political captives free and to uplift them on the socio-economic level of existence. This Jesus is only concerned with their secular affairs. He did not come to liberate them from sin, but from governments which impede political, social and economic progress. He blesses them in the struggle against their oppressors

without denouncing their amoral behaviour or stressing the need to engage in a spiritual struggle against the real oppressor of their souls, Satan.

A Jesus who died in hell. Another serious distortion of the redemptive work of Jesus that enjoys much popular appeal is proclaimed by *Word of Faith* preachers. According to them, the physical death of Jesus on the cross is not important as He, according to them, died spiritually in hell for the sins of the world. They allege that the cross is a symbol of weakness and a place of failure.

Jesus the sinner. The Jesus depicted in many Hollywood films is a fallen sinner like other human beings who are controlled by their fleshly passions. This blasphemous depiction of Jesus is the theme of films such as *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *The last temptation of Christ*, and *Jesus of Montreal*. In the last-mentioned film the counterfeit 'Jesus' is outrageously depicted as staying with other young people in a Montreal flat, where they live licentiously and overindulge in liquor.

The cosmic Jesus. The intensified campaign to misrepresent the Person, character, work and Name of Jesus is aimed at preparing the world for Satan's great end-time counterfeit Christ, the Antichrist. Jesus Himself warned that the world will be deceived by this impostor and others who would impersonate Him (Matt. 24:4-5). The New Age Movement presents a Jesus who is the personification of the messianic expectations of all the religions of the world. He is, therefore, the cosmic Christ, or universal Christ, of all faiths who will head up a spiritual hierarchy that unites, synthesises and thus supersedes all the religions on earth.

Another spirit

The motivating force behind the widespread presentation of another Jesus is another spirit, which comes directly from the devil so as to bring people under the power of delusion. Because of this very real danger, we are warned not to naïvely believe every spirit that works through false preachers and so-called prophets, but to test the spirits (1 John. 4:1,6). The spirit of error is intent on deceiving people with sensational signs and wonders (2 Thess. 2:9-12), thereby preparing the world for the coming of the cosmic Christ with his miracle-working powers (Rev. 13:12-14).

As we approach this time of great deception, many false prophets are appearing on the scene to deceive people with their occult, supernatural powers (Matt. 24:11,24). This will lead to a great falling-away from the true Christian faith by yielding to deceiving spirits (1 Tim. 4:1). The New Age Movement and its associated false religions is at present focusing attention on the discovery and use of the miracle-working psychic powers of healing, self-healing and the promotion of supernatural manifestations. Even at many Christian meetings strange phenomena are now common, e.g. 'falling in the spirit'. Various other phenomena, such as laughing in the spirit, prophesying in the spirit and dancing in the spirit, which result from this experience, are also attributed to the Holy Spirit. Many blindly accept these phenomena without testing the spirits, despite the danger of spurious satanic imitation in such manifestations.

Another gospel

The presentation of another Jesus under the motivation of another spirit can only be achieved within the theological framework of another gospel (2 Cor. 11:4). Wolves in sheep's skins (2 Cor. 11:13-15; 2 Tim. 4:3-4; Acts 20:29-30) are proclaiming false gospels such as the following:

Dead formalism. A gospel shorn of the full significance of the cross of Christ, His shed blood as the only means of cleansing from sin, the need for new birth and the indwelling Holy Spirit, is not a gospel at all and can only lead to dead formalism (2 Tim. 3:5; Mark. 7:6-13). Dead churches are often motivated by various social, ethical or political issues to 'positively' transform society.

Kingdom gospel. Advocates of the kingdom gospel are unwilling to wait for Christ to reign on earth as King of kings, but insist that we should reign as kings in the kingdom of God here and now. Reclaiming our lost dominion over creation, we must wield the Holy Spirit's power to subdue Satan and his demons, make disciples and despise the weak faith that is overcome by afflictions such as poverty and disease. Prosperity, signs and wonders are characteristics of the kingdom gospel, as well as the ecumenical uniting of all churches in order to demonstrate their strength to the world. However, in the process of unification, many Christian principles are abandoned.

The interfaith gospel. One of the false gospels that is rapidly expanding in today's world is the interfaith gospel of the synthesising of all religions. It is based on the concept of universalism, i.e. that all religions worship the same God and can therefore join hands in unity. The Ecumenical and Interfaith Movements are based on this idea and they are actively pursuing the objective of establishing global religious organisations to unify humanity at the spiritual level. They maintain that the achievement of a mystical brotherhood of members of all faiths holds the key to global reconciliation and peace. As the religions of the world move ever closer to each other, it is obvious that ecumenical Christianity has to make self-destructive compromises with other religions to achieve unity. Many theologians have adulterated the Christian faith to such an extent that biblical truths have been distorted beyond recognition. In emerging African theology, Christian practices are freely mixed with ancestor worship and witchcraft. Globally, Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam have been accommodated within this false brotherhood. The Bible calls the end-time union of the false religions "Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth" (Rev. 17:5). She is recognised and carried by the Antichrist because of her usefulness to him. It is very obvious that the Interfaith Movement of false religions is preparing the world for the coming false Christ, the Antichrist (2 Thess. 2:3,9). Many false teachers will deny Christ as Lord (2 Pet. 2:1-2) and assist in uniting Christianity with other religions.

Personal commitment

I trust that the Holy Spirit will guide me into all truth, and give me the knowledge and discernment to distinguish between the truth and all forms of deception. If I know the Bible, which is the truth, and Jesus Christ who is the way, the truth and the life, I will be protected against the subtle deceptions of the enemy. I take to heart the words of Jesus, when He said: "Take heed that no one deceives you... for false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (Matt. 24:4,24). With the psalmist I pray: "Direct my steps by Your Word, and let no iniquity have dominion over me" (Ps. 119:133).

Questions

1. Name and discuss three counterfeit presentations of Jesus.
2. Describe two differences between deceiving spirits and the Holy Spirit.
3. What is the form of deception on which kingdom theology is based?
4. Who will be the ultimate head of the multireligious organisation on earth?

14. Law and Grace

Many Christians find it hard to distinguish between God's law and His grace. In some verses in the New Testament, the perpetuation of the dispensation of the law is forbidden, but in other verses the lofty and timeless principles of God's law are impressed on us as guidelines for our lives and something to which we should commit ourselves. These two divergent perspectives are clearly evident from Paul's letters. On the one hand he says that we are not under the law but under grace (Rom. 6:14), and also that by the works of the law no flesh would be justified before God because the law condemns all people as sinners (Rom. 3:19-20). To the Galatians he says that the law has become a curse to us (Gal. 3:13) as no one can be saved by observing the law (Gal. 5:4).

On the other hand, Paul says that the law is holy and just and good (Rom. 7:12), and that its relevance as a guiding principle in our lives is confirmed (Rom. 3:31). The Lord Jesus also said that He did not come to destroy the law or the prophets but to fulfil them, and that nobody should be taught to break these commandments (Matt. 5:17-19). How then should we evaluate the law and what is the relationship between the law and grace?

The law and its NT application

The laws of the Lord are described in the first five books of the Bible and called the *Torah* in Hebrew. *Torah* means "to instruct" and comprises God's divine principles and statutes in terms of which His people must live. There are 613 laws in the *Torah*, which is also known as the *Pentateuch*. Some of them are timeless, universal rules which apply to all people, while others only had a preparatory function with a view to the coming of the Messiah. In Him they would be finally fulfilled and could not be continued in their original form without denying Him. Among these are the sacrifices and many of the feasts. Even the timeless rules were also fulfilled in the Messiah as only He was able to perfectly observe the law. Through His work of grace on the cross and the power of the Holy Spirit He enables believers to live in accordance with the spiritual and moral principles of God's law, which requires a pure heart, a holy life and dedicated service to the Lord. He makes it possible for us to give practical expression to the high spiritual objectives of the law (Micah 6:8).

How can we know which aspects of God's law are still applicable in the New Testament? The Lord Jesus summarised them all in the law of love (Matt. 22:36-40). In this summary, Christ quoted Scriptures which divide the law of God in two parts, i.e. love towards God (Deut. 6:5) and love towards our neighbours (Lev. 19:18,34). In observing the law of love we will fulfil all laws aimed at regulating our relationship with God and with our fellow human beings. If we truly love God, we will honour Him by living holy before Him and never serve other gods (2 Cor. 6:14-18). The same principle of love applies to our relationship with other people (Rom. 13:8-10).

Nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated in the New Testament, summarised in the law of love and applied to all believers. The first three commandments demand love towards God (Ex. 20:2-7), while the last six determine the nature of our human relations (Ex. 20:12-17). The fourth commandment determines the observance of the Sabbath on the seventh day of the week (Ex. 20:8-11). That is the only one of the Ten Commandments which is not reflected in Christ's summary of the law. Why not? Because it was only given to Israel as a sign between them and God (Ex. 31:16-17). Observance of the Sabbath was meant to fix Israel's attention to their exodus from Egypt (Deut. 5:15), and also to remind them of the fact that the Lord saves and sanctifies them (Ezek. 20:12).

The Sabbath (meaning “day of rest”) was the observance of one of the ceremonial laws that was only a shadow of things to come, as it was fulfilled in the Messiah (Col. 2:16-17). We are not subjected to laws about food (except food that has been sacrificed to idols – Acts 15:20), feasts and Sabbaths, as the new life in Christ is not dependent on the observance of these laws. In Christ we have entered the “rest” of the Lord, and every day should be a day of dedication to Him. Whether we have special days of dedication to the Lord, is a matter of personal conviction in the light of our circumstances (Rom. 14:5). We do not have any rigid laws or rules in this regard, only a long Christian tradition of Sunday worship. This tradition originated with the resurrection of Jesus on a Sunday, His preaching to the disciples on the same day (John 20:1,19-20,26), their meeting a week later, again on a Sunday, and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the seventh Sunday after the resurrection of Jesus. It coincided with the Jewish festival of Pentecost, which was always celebrated on a Sunday (Acts 2:1-4; cf. Lev. 23:15-16). After that, the Lord’s disciples spontaneously met on Sundays to celebrate His resurrection (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2), thereby clearly dissociating themselves from the legalistic meetings by orthodox Jews on the seventh day.

New Testament believers from the nations should take cognisance of the fact that they were never included in Israel’s covenants and laws – neither are they subjected to these institutions after their salvation. An important part of God’s covenant with the Jews includes the right of occupation of the land of Israel. This right, as well as various other aspects of their covenants with God, have not been transferred to the church and are therefore not applicable to them.

Characteristics of the law

Although the dispensation of the law has expired, it served the following important purposes:

- The law brought knowledge about sin – Rom. 3:20, 4:15; 5:13,20; 7:7; 1 Cor. 15:56.
- The law was an important preparation to the coming and work of grace of the Messiah, but the imperfect had to make way for the perfect – Heb. 7:27-28; 10:1-12.
- Israel was preserved under the law until the coming of the Messiah, when He did for them what the law could not do – Gal. 3:23-24.
- The law had to pave the way to a better covenant – Heb. 7:22; 8:6-7.

The termination of the dispensation of the law

The dispensation of the law, as an integrated system, came to an end with the coming of the Messiah, and more specifically His crucifixion, resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 10:4). The atoning death of the Lord Jesus not only ended the need for sacrificial service and the mediation by imperfect priests, but also the servitude to sin which was identified by the law, thereby placing a heavy yoke on people.

The law of Christ

We are under the law of Christ (John 13:34; Gal. 6:2), in which the timeless principles of the OT law are represented. However, we can never hope to find salvation outside Christ in futile efforts to observe the law, as we will fall from grace if we try to justify ourselves in terms of the law (Gal. 5:4). As far as the timeless principles of love towards God are concerned, the standard has been raised considerably in the NT. As believers we must be filled with the Holy Spirit and endued with His enabling power, thereby putting on the Lord Jesus (Rom. 13:14; Gal. 4:19), walk as He has walked (1 John 2:6) and be co-workers of God in Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 3:9). Concerning our

relationship with other people, the standard is also raised. It is no longer only a sin to commit the act of adultery, but even to entertain such thoughts (Matt. 5:27-28). Vindictiveness must be replaced by forgivingness and charitableness (Matt. 5:38-42) and hate by love (Matt. 5:43-47). We must rise to higher heights on the ladder of divine perfection (Matt. 5:48) by becoming holy in all our conduct because God who has called us is holy (1 Pet. 1:15-16).

When the principles of God's love have been written in our regenerated hearts (2 Cor. 3:3), we will be able to spread the fragrance of Christ everywhere (2 Cor. 2:14) by proclaiming a message of hope, love and forgiveness to a world in spiritual darkness. It will keep us from being overcome by evil by enabling us to overcome evil by good (Rom. 12:21) and thus exemplify the love, forgivingness and saving grace of Christ. We are also called to arouse the jealousy of orthodox Jews by the way in which we serve the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob through the Messiah (Rom. 11:11). They must be taught to serve the Lord in the newness of the Spirit (Rom. 7:6). When the redeemed of the Lord celebrate feasts, it must be truly Messianic feasts such as Holy Communion or the resurrection feast of the Messiah on Sundays. Pentecost and the feast of Tabernacles can also be celebrated as Messianic festivals in which the first coming of the Messiah, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the hope on the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus are explicitly recognised. When that is done, the particular feast is not merely a shadow of things to come, but has completely been fulfilled in the Messiah (Col. 2:16-17). In that way, the participant in the feast will proclaim to Israel *and* the rest of the world that their celebration is not within the framework of the law but within the framework of the Messiah's NT plan of salvation for all nations.

Personal commitment

I thank the Lord for His inexpressible grace which He revealed to Israel *and* the whole world through the Messiah. By this grace we are not only saved but its principles of divine love, on which the law is also based, teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, to live soberly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our Saviour, Jesus Christ (Titus 2:12-13). His law of love urges us to proclaim the message of salvation and sanctification to all nations.

Questions

1. What is the NT fulfilment of the law of God?
2. In what regard is love the fulfilment of the law?
3. How are the principles of God's love established in our hearts?
4. Name three characteristics of the OT law.
5. Give examples of moral standards in the NT being higher than those in the OT

15. Dispensations in the Bible

The divine history of humanity is ordered within the framework of the following eight dispensations. These dispensations are characterised by a progressive revelation of the knowledge of good and evil, which increases through various stages until we will fully know as we have been known fully by God (1 Cor. 13:12). In this process there is not only an increase in the knowledge of God and His righteousness, but also in the works of the opposing kingdom of darkness. The most important characteristics of the eight dispensations are as follows:

1. The dispensation of innocence

The very first dispensation in which Adam and Eve found themselves was that of innocence in Eden. They had no knowledge of good and evil and were not ashamed of their nakedness (Gen. 2:25). God had forbidden them to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and warned that they would surely die should they eat of its fruit (Gen. 2:17). With great cunning Satan deceived Adam and Eve into rebelling against God by disobeying Him (Gen. 3:1-5). They foolishly heeded Satan's advice and yielded to his evil influence, thus becoming sinners. They did not only become conscious of the distinction between good and evil, but became victims of evil. Spiritual death immediately set in, while they also physically became mortal beings. The dispensation of innocence ended with the Fall, which was the result of Satan's deception. Adam and Eve were driven from Eden.

2. The dispensation of the conscience

For a long time after the Fall, humanity had no law and could only distinguish between good and evil by way of the voice of their conscience. Various people pursued righteousness in accordance with their inner convictions and whatever personal revelations God gave them. Some of them, like Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph became preachers of righteousness. At times during this dispensation evil was so intense and pervasive that God's anger was kindled against humankind. During the Flood all but eight people were destroyed.

3. The dispensation of human government after the Flood

After the Flood God concluded a covenant with Noah (Gen. 9:1-9), and since then held the leaders of family groups, tribes or nations accountable for their decisions and the well-being of their followers. According to Romans 13:1, God instituted these authorities, or human governments. Genesis 10 has a list of the descendants of Noah through Shem, Ham and Japheth, all of whom became family heads, and later heads of nations. When these governments lapsed into idolatry, all their subjects followed them in their evil ways. Abraham was one of these patriarchs with a large following, but he believed in God and taught his followers to do the same. The consolidation of human powers gave rise to the establishing of the Babylonian world empire, which constituted a severe form of rebellion against the kingdom of God. It laid the foundation for various godless governments in the subsequent history of humanity.

4. The dispensation of the law

With the introduction of the dispensation of the law at Sinai a much clearer distinction was made between good and evil. God defined righteousness and sin in the Ten Commandments, but also through a great number of other laws and decrees. Satan concentrated on Israel to induce them to sin in an effort to subvert and nullify their calling as a special people of God. In spite of extensive

warnings, Israel often became backsliders who worshipped the idols of the heathen nations. Their inward motivation to serve God by observing His commandments was weak.

5. The dispensation of grace (the church age)

With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit the church age was ushered in. The Holy Spirit was given to guide people into all truth, to convict them of sin and righteousness, to regenerate them, and also to endue them with power from on high to serve Christ in a spiritually dark world. The knowledge of good and evil was increased through spiritual discernment – we have enlightened eyes of the mind (Eph. 1:18), but still not to its fullest extent: “For we know in part, and we prophesy in part” (1 Cor. 13:9). Despite Christians now having a strong weapon against Satan, his efforts to thwart God’s plan intensified as, for many centuries, he has conducted an all-out war against Christ’s church using Roman emperors, the medieval Roman Catholic Church and, later, secular humanism, communism, the interfaith and new age movements, in an attempt to destroy it – which has also failed.

6. The dispensation of the Antichrist’s reign

When the one who withholds – i.e. the true church indwelt by the Holy Spirit – has been taken out of the way during the rapture, the Antichrist will be revealed (2 Thess. 2:6-12). Strong delusion will prevail on earth and the masses will blindly believe the lies of the Antichrist. Evil will develop to its fullest extent and there will be no limits to blasphemous and sinful conduct. The second half of the Antichrist’s reign of seven years will be a time of unprecedented demonic activity (Rev. 12:12). In contrast with this, the true believers who have been raptured, will have perfect, immortal bodies, perfect joy and perfect knowledge. They will be with Christ forever (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

7. The dispensation of the millennial kingdom

During the Millennium the glorified believers will rule with Christ (Rev. 5:10; 20:6). As immortal beings they will not be subjected to pain, sorrow, misery or death; neither will they be limited by any form of imperfectness. Their knowledge of God will be perfect. During that time, the spiritually restored Israel will proclaim the praises of the Lord, and the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isa. 11:9). The devil will be bound in a bottomless pit (Rev. 20:2-3) and the peace and righteousness of God will prevail upon all the earth.

8. The dispensation of eternity

This dispensation will be endless. In the new heaven and on the new earth “there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of life” (Rev. 21:27). Perfect peace and joy will prevail as the believers will be in the presence of God forever. The lake of fire where Satan, his demons and all lost people will be confined and punished for their rebellion against God, will also exist for all eternity (Rev. 14:9-11; 20:15; Dan. 12:2). There will never again in the same place, as presently on earth, be a co-existence of the opposing kingdoms of light and darkness. Satan’s kingdom will be utterly destroyed, and he and the millions of fallen angels and unsaved sinners will be punished in the lake of fire forever.

Dispensational knowledge

Christians need to understand the nature of the different dispensations in the Bible. To the people of every dispensation it was imperative to have the best possible knowledge of good and evil, so they could please God and take the right decisions to be victorious in their struggle against sin.

Early in the dispensation of the conscience, God explained the nature of this struggle to Cain, as well as the need to rule over temptations and sin (Gen. 4:7). However, he rejected the knowledge of the Lord by not walking in the ways of God, thereby allowing evil to overcome him and ruin his life. Because Cain, like all people, had a free will, all options were open to him. What happens to people is the result of their deliberate choices.

During the dispensation of the law God revealed Himself in a very special way to Israel (Ex. 20). But Israel soon forgot the ordinances of the Lord and went spiritually astray on Satan's ways of deception and sin. These wanderings were the direct result of a lack of knowledge of God and His holy will (Hos. 4:1,6). God often called Israel to repentance from this backslidden condition (Jer. 4:1; 5:3; 18:11; Hos. 14:2).

During the church dispensation it is also vitally important that we are filled with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that we may lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God (Col. 1:9-10; John 8:31-32). God Himself is the truth, Jesus is the truth, and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth who will guide us into all truth (John 17:17; 14:6; 16:13). How well do you know the truth? Without a good knowledge of divine truths you will not be able to walk in these truths always, and consequently fail to do God's will in all aspects of your life.

During the coming tribulation period, the knowledge of God and His Word will be so scarce on earth (Amos 8:11-12) that people will wrongly accept the Antichrist as the true Christ and also worship him (Rev. 13:4,8). If we do not increase in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:18), we will be victims of Satan's spirit of deceit.

Personal commitment

What a privilege to have a biblical perspective on God's plan for mankind. In the light of this knowledge I understand that we are now living in the time of the great falling away from the truth, and that every effort must be taken to remain standing against the wiles of Satan. I thank the Lord for His Word and His Spirit, giving me insight to grow in the knowledge of God (Eph. 1:17-18; Col. 1:9-10). We are to be blamed if we lack this knowledge and spiritual power in our lives (Matt. 22:29). In a time such as this, very close to the end of the church dispensation, we should have a clear knowledge of contemporary trends and guard against growing cold in our love for the Lord when iniquity increases (Matt. 24:12). We should also be informed about Satan's mystery of lawlessness to be able to actively restrain it (2 Thess. 2:7). May the Lord find us watching and praying when He comes (Luke 21:36), busy fulfilling the Great Commission which He gave to His disciples.

Questions

1. What does the dispensation of the law comprise of?
2. What are the principles of the dispensation of grace?
3. What are the differences between the church dispensation and the dispensation of the kingdom?
4. What are the main characteristics of the coming rule of the Antichrist?

16. Heaven and Hell

The Bible makes clear pronouncements on both heaven and hell as distinct places.

Heaven

There are three heavens. The Bible refers to the following three heavens: **1.** The atmosphere around the earth, which is the habitation of the birds of heaven (Jer. 4:25; Ezek. 38:20; Hos. 2:18; Matt. 6:26, 13:32). **2.** The starry heaven (Ps. 8:3; Ezek. 32:7; Matt. 24:29; Rev. 8:10). **3.** The third heaven, which is the highest heaven where God is (Luke 2:14; 2 Cor. 12:2-4; Eph. 4:10).

It is the dwelling-place of the Triune God: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. (Deut. 26:15; Eccl. 5:2; Matt. 5:16; Luke 24:51; Acts 7:55-56; Eph. 6:9; Col. 4:1; 1 Thess. 1:10, 4:16; 2 Thess. 1:7; Heb. 8:1; 1 Pet. 1:12; 1 John 5:7).

It is also the dwelling-place of angels. (Matt. 22:30; Luke 2:15; 22:43).

The kingdom of heaven. This kingdom rules over the entire universe, and is controlled from the throne of God, which is in heaven (Ps. 103:19; Acts 7:49). The Lord Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father (Mark 16:19; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3; 1 Pet. 3:22).

Blessings and judgement come from heaven. God provides spiritual food for His children from heaven in the form of His Son and His Word (John 6:31-35; Luke 4:4). Christians who contravene the divine principles of the Word, are sinning against heaven (Luke 15:18,21). Judgements are also poured out from heaven upon the wicked (Luke 17:29; Rom. 1:18).

Christians have a heavenly destination. Our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20) because our names are also written up there (Luke 10:20). The Lord Jesus is preparing an eternal home for us in the heavenly city, the new Jerusalem, which is in the house of His Father (John 14:2-3; Rev. 3:12; 21:1-2). That is part of our heavenly inheritance (1 Pet. 1:4) of which the beauty is indescribable (1 Cor. 2:9).

Heavenly treasures. Those who suffered tribulation on earth for the sake of Christ will be rewarded in heaven (Luke 6:22-23). They are encouraged to also use other means to ensure that they lay up treasures in heaven by supporting the work of the Lord financially and to do things that have value for eternity (Luke 12:21,33; 18:22; 2 Cor. 8:9; 9:6-7).

Joy in heaven. There is joy in heaven for every person who is saved and thus becomes a member of this divine kingdom (Luke 15:7). The saints will be full of joy when they receive their glorified resurrection bodies, which will elevate them far above the limitations of their earthly existence (2 Cor. 5:1-2; Phil. 3:21).

Hell

The Lord Jesus said more about hell than any other preacher in biblical times. His warnings against the terrible consequences of sin were the plainest and sharpest in all the Bible. Consider the following statements of the Lord Jesus about hell: Matt. 5:22; 10:28; 13:40-42,49-50; 23:33; 25:41,46; Mark 9:43-49; Luke 16:19-31.

Jesus referred to hell as a place where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched (Mark. 9:48). We are also informed that hell is an eternal lake of fire burning with brimstone (Rev.

14:10-11; 19:20). The rich man in hell knew that he was not simply in some spiritual state, and he wanted his brothers warned “lest they also come in this place of torment.” Hell is a literal “place of torment” where the wicked are punished (Luke 16:22-28). During the second resurrection, the unsaved dead will be resurrected from their graves, appear before God as condemned people, and will then be judged and cast into the lake of fire forever (Dan. 12:2; Rev. 20:11-15). The unsaved will be resurrected just as sure as the saved will be resurrected (John 5:28-29).

The Lord Jesus referred to physical bodies in hell when He said that sinners will be cast into the everlasting hell fire (Matt. 18:8-9). We must fear God because He can condemn people to hell (Matt. 10:28). The devil has deceived people who do not know God’s Word into believing that hell is some indefinite, ghostly place where there might be discomfort but no conscious suffering or physical torment. In this way, all fear for the judgements of God are removed from people’s minds. May God help us to see that the most severe tortures await the doomed and damned souls who have rejected Christ and will go to hell.

The terms used in the Bible about hell and about the condemnation of the lost people are not words of temporary meaning. They are words that indicate an eternity of suffering and shame (Dan. 12:2; Mark 3:29; Rev. 14:10-11). How profoundly moved a Christian ought to be when he thinks of hell and the millions who go there! It is little wonder that modern Christians move away from the burden and passion for the salvation of sinners. They have forgotten the Bible’s teaching on hell. The preachers have explained away the torments of the damned! What a compelling motive we have for prayer, for preaching, for soul winning when we learn that every human being who leaves this world without a definite change in heart immediately lifts his eyes in the place of the doomed, underway to the eternal lake of fire.

Unbelievers often say that they, weak and sinful men, would not send their children to a place like hell, and that if God loves His children He would not condemn them to go to hell. But the unsaved sinners are not children of God. No person is a child of God until he is born again. The unsaved are the children of wrath. Jesus said to the Pharisees, “You are of your father the devil” (John 8:44). God’s children never go to hell, but the children of the devil do. How foolish to charge God with wrongdoing because people go to hell. Hell is the result of people’s sins. People go to hell because they ought to, not because God hates them. Sin is a hateful subject to those who do not like the Biblical teaching about hell, but sin is the cause of hell (Rom. 6:23; Ezek. 18:4).

The Lord Jesus said that a person’s soul is worth more than all the treasures of the world (Mark 8:36-37). Sinners have lost everything if they have lost their souls. Unfortunately, most of the people on earth are on their way to this gruesome destination (Matt. 7:13-14). The false prophets and others who only have a form of godliness will be very surprised to open their eyes in this place of torture (Matt. 7:21-23).

The unsaved are always wicked but regard one another as very good and virtuous people. But the Bible very clearly describes the depraved condition of the human heart (Isa. 53:6; Jer. 17:9; Mark 7:20-23; Rom. 3:10,23). The rich man deserved to go to hell. He was a sinner. Outwardly he may have been moral, upright, intelligent and loveable. However, in his heart, where God alone could see, he was a deliberate, malicious, wilful, continual, unrepentant sinner against God. Remember that those were refined, educated, cultured, religious, praying men who condemned Christ to be crucified. They were wolves in sheep’s clothing. What Jesus said about them describes the heart of the best moral man who has not trusted Christ (Matt. 23:13,27-28).

Those who have not had a change of heart may appear to us moral or clean or good, but they are only so outwardly. God, who knows the hearts of men, knows of the unsaved hearts of people. It was for this reason that the Lord Jesus said to Nicodemus, one of the unsaved religious leaders of Israel, that he must be born again (John. 3:3). Jesus gave a very clear explanation why sinners

must turn and believe in Him if they wish to avert eternal condemnation (John 3:19-20). The best proof of any man's wicked heart is the fact that he has not turned to Christ. The only honest reason any man could ever give for not coming to Jesus is that he loves sin and will not come to Christ, the Light, lest his sin should be reprov'd. People without God may be cultured, may be pleasant, may be courteous and refined, but they certainly are not good. They are bad by choice.

The lost person's heart is deliberately wicked, wicked enough to hate Christ, the Light of the world. Men reject Christ purposely, loving sin. Without being converted such wicked sinners must go to hell. The Lord Jesus said that it is a futile effort to love God *and* the world, as no one can serve two masters (Matt. 6:24). The man who does not hold to Christ despises Him.

The rich man did not go to hell because he led a bad life outwardly. The Bible does not say that he committed adultery, or murder, that he gambled, or drank, or swore. His trouble was inside. Like unsaved men, women, and children everywhere, he had a wicked heart. In his secret heart, he was against God. People who are outwardly moral and upright go to hell by the thousands. Be sure to remember, too, that the rich man did not go to hell because he was rich. Hell has more poor people than rich people, we may be sure. He knew that he was in hell because he was unsaved (Luke 16:30). God does not want that any sinner will be lost (John 3:17; 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:3-4; Ezek. 33:11; John 3:16). Repent to the Lord Jesus today and make sure that you will escape the torments of hell. (Many of the statements in this section were derived from the booklet: *Hell – what the Bible says about it*, by Dr. John Rice).

Personal commitment

My consciousness of the eternal heavenly bliss that awaits the saved, as well as the everlasting punishment of the unsaved, has been strengthened. The narrow way leads to heaven while the broad way inevitably leads to the lake of fire. I commit myself anew to the Great Commission to proclaim the message of Christ's saving grace to lost humanity so that more people may come over from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. So many people only have a form of godliness as their lives have been built on false foundations. They must also seriously heed the warning to Nicodemus that no person will see the kingdom of God unless he is born again (John 3:3). If we do not warn the wicked to turn from their ways they will be lost, but the Lord will require their blood at our hands (Ezek. 33:7-9). Let us proclaim the Word of the Lord in such a way that people will realise what awaits them in eternity. It is unthinkable why sinners would prefer to spend eternity in the lake of fire while the saving grace of the Lord Jesus is offered to all of us.

Questions

1. To how many heavens does the Bible refer?
2. Who are the people who can be sure that they have a home in heaven?
3. What kind of punishment will sinners suffer in hell, and for how long will it last?
4. Why will a loving God condemn people to hell?
5. How can people be kept from hell?

17. Signs of the Times

There is a large body of prophetic information in the Bible, which refers to major events that will occur in the world before and during the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. These signs of the times help us understand the unfolding of God's divine plan for humanity, so we can be better prepared for future events. The Lord expects of us to heed these signs as their message is just as obvious as the signs of nature (Luke 12:54-56). The Israelis know that when clouds gather from the Mediterranean Sea in the west, rain is coming. When a strong southerly wind blows across the plains of the hot Negev desert, they know that it will be a very hot day. Those who fail to interpret the signs of the times are branded as hypocrites – spiritually blinded people who are ignorant of what the Lord is communicating to them through the very obvious fulfilment of biblical prophecies.

There will nevertheless be a surprise element in the rapture as most of the signs will only have their final fulfilment during the seven years of tribulation between the rapture and the Second Coming of Christ. However, these signs will become more and more obvious as we approach the time of the rapture, which is the secret coming of the heavenly Bridegroom to take away all true believers from the world (Luke 21:36; John 14:2-3; 1 Thess. 4:16-17). We should be able to discern the early beginnings of these signs as an indication that the time of our departure is at hand (Luke 21:28). The following are the most important signs of the end-time:

1. The restoration of Israel

The Lord promised that, in the latter days, He would gather the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone (Hos. 3:5; Jer. 23:8; 31:8-11; Ezek. 36:22-25; 37:21). A very important aspect of their restoration is the status of the city of Jerusalem. According to Luke 21:24, Jerusalem would be trodden down by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. The physical recapturing of biblical Jerusalem (the Old City) occurred in 1967 during the Six Day War, which was a prelude to its political restoration as Israel's eternal and indivisible capital city in August 1980. The latter event inaugurated the terminal generation of the present dispensation (Luke 21:32). According to the Bible, there will be a great end-time struggle for the control of Jerusalem (Zech. 12:2-3; 14:2) because Jesus Christ will return to this city at His Second Coming (Zech. 14:4-5). His enemies will await Him here, but the ensuing battle will lead to their utter destruction (Zech. 14:12-13). Events in Israel are very important signs of the times.

2. The Russo-Arab invasion of Israel

In Ezekiel 38 and 39, a Russo-Arab invasion of Israel is described. The ruler of Russia is called Gog and his country Magog. This is an ancient name for modern Russia, as it refers to the large area to the north of the Caucasian Mountains and the Black Sea. The major allies of Russia are identified as Persia (present Iran), Ethiopia, Libya, Gomer (probably referring to Germany) and Togarmah (present Turkey). It is clearly indicated that they will invade Israel in the latter days (Ezek. 38:3-8,16). In Ezekiel 39, the destruction of Gog and his hordes is described.

3. The restoration of Babylon

Revelation 18 refers to a metropolis with the name of Babylon. It is the same city as the one that existed in ancient times, but in the end-time it will be restored to its former glory. As the birthplace of the Ancient World's pagan religions, this city must again emerge as the seat of a false universal religion. Babylon is situated on the banks of the Euphrates River in Iraq. It is no coincidence that two of the last six chapters of the Bible are devoted to Babylon. In Revelation 17, mystery Babylon is described and identified as the mother of harlots. This is an indication that all the false religions

that originated from Babylon will be organised into a single ecumenical body in the end-time (Rev. 17:1-6). Their final abode will be the restored city of Babylon. The revived commercial city of Babylon is described in Revelation 18. Babylon will have to be restored before its final destruction during the great tribulation (Isa. 13:19-22; Jer. 51:61-64; Rev. 18:1-2,8-10,17-21).

4. The Revived Roman Empire

The ancient Roman Empire also has to re-emerge in the end-time as a power-base for the Antichrist. In the image of Daniel (Dan. 2:31-45), the Roman Empire is represented by the legs and ten toes. In the night visions of Daniel, the vicious beast with ten horns on its head also depicts the Roman Empire, from which the Antichrist will arise (Dan. 7:7-8,19-26). The symbolism of the beast with the ten horns is also found in Revelation 13:1-2, which describes the Antichrist. From these prophecies it is evident that the Roman Empire will again dominate the world. It will comprise countries from Western Europe, Eastern Europe, The Middle East and North Africa. The European Union is rapidly expanding and will constitute the revived Roman Empire.

5. The New World Order

The Antichrist will be the head of a new world order, which includes all nations. He will establish a world empire based on political, religious and economic power bases (Rev. 13:2,4,7,16-18). The present new world order, aimed at globalisation, paves the way for this future dispensation.

6. Religious deception

In the last days, heretical teachings promoted by demons, will have disastrous consequences in many Christian churches (1 Tim. 4:1). False teachings will proliferate everywhere (2 Tim. 4:3-4; 2 Pet. 2:1-2; Matt. 7:21-23; 24:4-5,11,24; 2 Cor. 11:2-4; Gal. 1:6-9; 1 John 4:1).

7. Moral decline

Serious moral decline will occur in the end-time (2 Tim. 3:1-5). Many Christians will also be detrimentally influenced by this rising tide of immorality (Matt. 24:12). It will be like the times of Noah and Lot, as wickedness, violence and homosexuality will be rife (Matt. 24:37).

8. Natural disasters

In the end-time there will be a great increase in natural disasters such as earthquakes, droughts, pollution of the air and fresh water resources, heat-waves, unprecedented hailstorms, and burning fragments of heavenly bodies that will fall on the earth and in the sea, causing huge waves (Matt. 24:7; Rev. 6:12-13; 8:8-12; 11:6; 16:4,8,18-21). The *tsunami* in Southeast Asia on 26th December 2004 was one of the worst natural disasters in recorded history. It was caused by a massive earthquake on the seabed. Natural disasters will greatly increase in the coming tribulation period and cause severe panic and a big loss of lives (Luke 21:25-26).

9. Famines and pestilences

Famines and pestilences will be common (Matt. 24:7), causing many deaths in the great tribulation. Food will become very scarce and expensive. Pestilences refer to disease epidemics that will increase and spread beyond control. HIV/Aids could be one of them.

10. Wars

The tribulation period will be a time of unprecedented wars, leading up to the great battle of Armageddon (Matt. 24:6-7; Rev. 6:4,8; 16:13-14,16; 19:19-21; Zech. 14:2-3,12-13). A big military invasion from the East, probably by China and its allies, is also described (Rev. 9:13-19).

11. World evangelism

One sign of the end-times which has a positive nature is that of world evangelism. Before the end comes, the gospel must be preached to all nations (Matt. 24:14). All Christians should dedicate themselves to achieving this objective (Luke 14:23).

The wrath of God

The signs of the times graphically illustrate the fact that the God of love, who wants to save all people (1 Tim. 2:3-4), is also the God of wrath who will severely judge unrepentant sinners (Heb. 2:3; 1 Thess. 1:10). We should not emphasise only certain attributes of God at the cost of others, as we may end up with "another Jesus" who is an invention of the human mind (2 Cor. 11:4), and consequently not true to Scripture. God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9). But unrepentant sinners will be judged.

During the coming tribulation, when the wrath of God will be poured out upon the world, most of the hardened sinners will become more wicked, to the extent of even cursing God because of all the plagues (Rev. 9:20-21). For that reason, they leave a loving God no choice but to judge them. Our command is to heed the signs of the times by facing the fact that the greatest part of the world population will become more evil, selfish, immoral, untrustworthy, violent and God-rejecting in the end-time. We must, at all times, refrain from joining the licentious crowds of the end-time (Rom. 13:12-14). The world is heading for its darkest hour, and also a great tribulation which will be unprecedented in human history (Matt. 24:21-22). But as in the times of Noah and Lot, the principle remains that God's wrath is never poured out upon true believers (Luke. 21:36).

Personal commitment

The signs of the times are motivating me to be ready for the coming of the heavenly Bridegroom. By His grace, I will escape the divine judgements upon a sinful world just as sure as Noah and Lot escaped the judgements upon the wicked people of their time. I embrace this promise, and therefore do not have an Antichrist expectation but a Christ expectation. After the true church of Christ (the wise virgins) has departed the Antichrist will be revealed without any resistance, deceive the masses and institute his reign of terror on earth. I realise that in a time such as this I must, more than ever before, guard against spiritual backsliding and moral sins (Matt. 24:12) as the power of delusion is very strong. Satan's spirit of deceit is intent on inducing Christians to forsake their faith (1 Tim. 4:1). Through the signs of the times, Christ admonishes us to remain true to Him, to be ready for His sudden coming, and to use the remaining time in the best possible way by warning others against the impending judgements of God.

Questions

1. What is the significance of Israel as a sign of the end-time?
2. Who are the enemies that will invade Israel according to Ezekiel 38?
3. In what regard does the European Union play a role in the fulfilment of biblical prophecies?

4. What is the new world order and what are its three power bases?
5. Describe the moral and spiritual standards that will prevail in the last days.

18. The Second Coming of Christ

To correctly understand the Second Coming of Christ, we have to clearly discern its two phases, i.e. the return of Christ **for** His saints (i.e. all born-again believers) and His coming **with** His saints. During the first phase the coming of the heavenly Bridegroom will be unexpected, like a thief in the night. He will meet His bride in the air and quickly take her away to heavenly places (John 14:2-3; 1 Thess. 4:16-17). All true Christians will be raptured, or caught away swiftly, to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:17). During the second phase, His appearance will be public and every eye will see Him (Rev. 1:7). He will be accompanied by His bride, as well as a heavenly army, and will set foot upon the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4-5; Rev. 19:11-15).

Glorification and catching up

The glorification of Christians will begin at the moment when the trumpet is sounded, the deceased saints raised from the dead in incorruptible bodies, and the living saints transformed in an instant to receive their glorified bodies (1 Cor. 15:51-53). When that happens, we will have immortal, glorified bodies like that of Christ (1 John 3:2), but He will be far superior to us as He is the Head of the church (Eph. 5:23). That will happen in the twinkling of an eye as we enter a new dimension of existence (Phil. 3:20-21).

Immediately after the deceased believers have been raised and they, with the living believers, have been clothed with glorified bodies, Christ will take them all up to heaven to be ever with Him (1 Thess. 4:14-17). Note that this meeting will take place in the air and involves only born-again Christians. The Lord Jesus does not set foot on the Mount of Olives and reveal Himself to the world at this stage, but returns immediately with His bride to His Father's house in heaven. The word *caught up*, that is used by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 (*harpazo* in Greek), clearly means to be *raptured* or *snatched away rapidly*.

A concept which is closely related to the rapture, is that of the first resurrection. At this event, the Lord Jesus will come to raise only born-again believers; this is why Paul says that "the dead in Christ shall rise first" (1 Thess. 4:16). Nothing whatsoever is said here about the resurrection of the unbelieving, unjust dead. Since a first resurrection also implies a second, and since we know that the just as well as the unjust will be raised (Acts 24:15), it follows that the unjust dead will be raised at a later resurrection. Revelation 20 says that a thousand years will separate the two resurrections. John refers to all the saints who will be raised in the first resurrection to reign as kings with Christ during the millennium (Rev. 20:4-6).

Escape

In the light of the circumstances which will prevail on earth, the rapture will offer Christians an escape from the threatening judgements. As the moment of the rapture nears, it will be a dark time of massive spiritual deception. Evangelical Christians will be declared unchristian, unloving and judgmental, and will be despised. They will be regarded as prophets of doom because they proclaim the imminent judgements of God which will fall upon the world during the great tribulation. They will also be regarded as disloyal to the Christian cause because of their unwillingness to join the ecumenical movement and accept the unitary reforms of the New Age

Movement. As the time for the revelation of the Antichrist approaches, true Christians will be subjected to immense pressure, intimidation and threats. However, they should take courage in the light of the promise that the truly born-again children of God will escape the coming tribulation period (Luke 21:36; According to Rev. 3: 10, we will be kept from the hour of tribulation).

The Lord clearly offers us escape from the coming judgements upon the world. The tribulation period will definitely be a time of divine judgement. When the powers of heaven are shaken and people's hearts fail them from fear and the expectation of even greater disasters they will become panic-stricken, flee to the mountains and call on the mountains and rocks to hide them from the face of the Lamb (Rev. 6:15-17). If we watch and pray, we will be spiritually worthy to escape these judgements (Luke 21:34-36). Never in history has God ever poured out His judgements upon believers.

Although the rapture is a unique occurrence, there are examples in the Bible of times when God poured out His wrath, but provided an escape route for true believers since they were not the objects of His wrath (Gen. 6:5-14). Shortly before the outpouring of God's judgements in the time of Noah, eight believers escaped the disaster area by entering the ark. God Himself closed the door behind them before He judged the wicked who despised God's way of escape (Gen. 7:16-23).

In the time of Lot another rescue operation took place. The night before Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, Lot and his family received an urgent command to depart from the area marked out for judgement. The angels urged Lot to leave Sodom and helped him and his family to do so before they destroyed it. Shortly after their departure, fire and brimstone rained down on the ungodly (Gen. 19:13-17; 22-25). The Lord Jesus says that there is a clear correlation between these historical events and God's end-time dealing with believers *and* unbelievers (Luke 17:26-30; also read Genesis chaps. 6, 7 & 19).

After Christ has secretly caught up His church He will pour out judgements upon a godless world from His throne in heaven (Rev. 6–19). The glorified church will then be assembled around His throne (Rev. 4:4; 5:9-10). At the end of the seven years of tribulation Jesus Christ will return to earth and be revealed to all people (Zech. 14:4-5; Col. 3:4). That will be the second phase of His coming.

His public appearance

On the last day of the great tribulation, during the battle of Armageddon, Jesus Christ will appear on a white horse, followed by a heavenly army of angels and all His saints, to engage in a short but decisive battle with His enemies (Rev. 19:11-21). The Second Coming of Jesus, which is described in Revelation 19, will be like lightning that will be seen from everywhere. But physically He will return to the city of Jerusalem (Zech. 14:4-5). The darkness of God's judgements will descend upon the world. The Lord will smite His enemies with the sword that proceeds from His mouth. He will only utter a word, which will lead to their destruction. In the ensuing confusion they will kill one another (Zech. 14:2-4; 12-13). Then will they experience that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:31; Isa. 13:9-12; Joel 2:2,11; 3:2), since they were foolish enough to declare war against Him (Rev. 19:19).

In Revelation 19:20 it is clearly stated that the Antichrist and the false prophet will both be captured on the day of the Second Coming of Jesus and cast alive into the lake of fire. The place where this confrontation and judgement will occur is most significant from a biblical perspective. According to Joel 3 it will be in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, which is the Kidron Valley between the Mount of Olives and the Temple Mount. *Jehoshaphat* means *The Lord judges*. After this, Satan will be bound in a pit for 1000 years (Rev. 20:1-3). The description of the binding of the devil is an

extension of the scenario in Revelation 19 and is therefore a direct result of the return of Jesus. It follows immediately after the final judgement of the Antichrist and the false prophet, and is therefore not an event that can be extracted from this context and applied to the present dispensation of the church.

The wedding feast of the Lamb

After the return of Christ, the wedding feast of the Lamb will be celebrated on earth (Rev. 19:7-9). During His Second Coming the Lord Jesus will have been united with His bride that was raptured to heaven seven years earlier. The consummation of the marriage in heaven will then be complete but the marriage feast will still have to be celebrated. The saved remnant of Israel will be among the guests at this glorious occasion and their joy will be complete. A saved remnant of the nations will also participate in the celebrations.

With His Second Coming, the bride will share in the crowning moment of the great triumph of Christ when He returns to the earth as King of kings and Lord of lords to crush the power of all His enemies, and establish a government of righteousness in which His servants will reign with Him. He will restore the throne of David in Jerusalem (Acts 15:16-17) and institute His thousand-year reign of peace. Those who will be proved to have been good and faithful servants of the Lord during the present dispensation will be rewarded by assigning special positions to them in His kingdom (Luke 19:17,19).

We now have the opportunity to dedicate ourselves to the Lord and work for Him (2 Cor. 5:10). At His Second Coming He will reward us for these works of faith and appoint us to be co-rulers with Him in His millennial reign. He expects of His servants not to be idle in His kingdom or to appear before Him empty-handed (Luke 19:20-23), but to be found faithful so He can further use them in His kingdom by entrusting them with greater responsibilities.

Personal commitment

My great purpose in life is to do the works of Him who has sent me while it is still day, as the night of God's judgements is coming when no one can work. May the Lord Jesus find me busy executing His commands when He comes to take us away to our heavenly home. When we are in Christ we do not have to fear the judgements, as there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit (Rom. 8:1). We shall not come into judgement since we have passed from death into life (John 5:24). What a wonderful day to look forward to, when Jesus Christ is coming for His bride so that she can escape all the judgements that will come upon the sinners, and to stand before the Son of Man. Indescribable joy will be experienced by her – eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him (1 Cor. 2:9).

Questions

1. Name the two phases of the coming of Christ.
2. Describe the rapture as a form of escape.
3. Where will Christ appear during His public coming?
4. What will He do after that?
5. Who will accompany the Lord Jesus at His Second Coming?

19. The Antichrist

During the entire church dispensation, there were many tyrants who played a typical antichristian role by deceiving, opposing and fighting Christians. They were all antichrists, and as such forerunners of the great, end-time Antichrist (1 John 2:18). Paul gives more details on the revelation of the final Antichrist, as well as his destruction at the Second Coming of Christ (2 Thess. 2:3-12).

In this Scripture, a clear indication is given of the taking away of the one who restrains, before the lawless one (the Antichrist) can be revealed. The one who restrains is the true church of Christ as the temple of the Holy Spirit on earth (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19). We should remember that only the Holy Spirit can restrain the Antichrist and his satanic spirit of error (1 John 4:1-6). When the church departs at the rapture, the light of the world vanishes and leaves the world spiritually in total darkness. Then, when there is no one who can expose the works of darkness, the Antichrist will be revealed without any opposition and be accepted worldwide.

The four horsemen

According to Revelation 6:1-8, the Antichrist will be revealed in a highly deceptive way as an angel of light in an effort to first mislead people, and later to extend his merciless dictatorship over them. In the first stage of his rule he will appear to the world as a global peacemaker who brings hope and new opportunities of economic survival to a conflict-ridden and poverty-stricken world (the rider on the white horse). He will deceive everybody and successfully disguise his true identity. His claim to be a special man of God will be based on astounding supernatural powers and miracles. All religions of the world will accept him as their common messiah. To the deceived, nominal Christians he will be the Christ, to the Jews the Messiah, to the Muslims the Imam Mahdi, to the Hindus Krishna, and to the Buddhists the Maitreya Buddha. In a show of clever diplomacy he will also unite the world politically and become the head of a world government.

When his peace initiatives and political and religious unification reforms collapse after 3½ years, the Antichrist will show his true colours and turn to coercion to enforce his authority over the world, becoming a cruel military dictator (the rider on the red horse). The next logical action will be stringent economical control and food rationing during the severe wars and famine (the rider on the black horse). After these calamities, the only activity left for the Antichrist is his ride as the angel of death to reap as many souls as possible to join him in perdition (the rider on the pale horse). What commenced as a peace movement will end in utter tragedy.

Identity of the Antichrist

In Revelation 13, more details are given about the identity and character of this evil world leader. He is described as a beast having seven heads while his co-ruler, the false prophet, is also described as a beast but of a different appearance (Rev. 13:1-18). In Revelation 17, another intimate ally of the Antichrist is mentioned, from whom we may learn more about the beast. That is the harlot woman who represents all the false, antichristian religions of all times (Rev. 17:1-18). This woman is the mother of the apostates, and as such a spiritual parent organisation (an alliance or ecumenical body) of all the false religions. She was closely associated with the previous world empires and will also enjoy official recognition in the future kingdom of the beast. In Revelation 17:9-11 we are given more information about her and the beast on which she is riding.

The first conclusion that we must come to about this Scripture is that it is not referring to the seven mountains of Rome, and therefore the prophecy is not about the Roman Catholic Church. It says that the seven mountains are seven kings (or kingdoms) that succeed one another

chronologically. We know that it does not refer to Roman emperors, as between Nero and Constantine alone there were ten antichristian Caesars in power. In this passage God gives us a broad perspective on seven consecutive world empires as the major strongholds of heathen religions throughout the centuries. In Genesis, Isaiah and Daniel mention is made of these empires. They are: **1.** The ancient Babylonian Empire established by Nimrod; **2.** The Assyrian Empire that took the ten tribes of Israel captive in the 8th century BC; **3.** The neo-Babylonian Empire that conquered the kingdom of Judah in the 6th Century BC and took many of its subjects captive to Babylon; **4.** The Medo-Persian Empire; **5.** The Greek Empire; **6.** The Roman Empire; and **7.** The end-time empire of the Antichrist.

When Revelation was written in 95 AD, five of these empires had fallen – from the ancient Babylonian to the Greek – the Roman was currently ruling, while the end-time empire of the beast (Antichrist) was still future. This is precisely what Revelation 17:10 says, i.e. “five have fallen, one is, *and* the other has not yet come.” This last empire is symbolised by the head with ten horns. The allusion in verse 11 to the beast being “the eighth” and “of the seven” kingdoms indicates that his will be both the 7th and the 8th. The 7th is an empire like the Roman when he rules in alliance with other kings during the first 3½ years (v. 12); while the 8th is when, as sole military dictator, he rules over the whole world during the final 3½ years (Rev. 13:3-4).

A common characteristic of the first six empires is that all of them were extremely hostile towards the kingdom of God on earth. Their occult practices, pantheism, immorality, the deification of their leaders, humanism, and rebellion against God, will culminate in the seventh empire of the Antichrist and descend to even greater depths of spiritual darkness and deception. The unanimity among them has its roots in mystery Babylon, the immoral mother of all the false religions. She exerted a tremendous influence on the previous world empires, and was responsible for their wicked nature (Rev. 17:18).

The Antichrist is so closely identified with the previous world empires that he is depicted with the body of a leopard, the paws of a bear, the mouth of a lion and with ten horns on his head (Rev. 13:2). These symbols correspond with those in Daniel 7 where the Babylonian Empire is represented as a lion, the Medo-Persian Empire as a bear, the Greek Empire as a leopard and the Roman Empire as a ferocious beast with ten horns on its head.

It is evident that the empire of the Antichrist will not only be a revival of the Roman Empire, but of all the great world empires. It will have particularly strong Babylonian features. For this reason it is wrong to regard Western Europe as the revived Roman Empire and to allege that the Antichrist must come from Rome. His origin will be from a country that formed part of all the previous world empires, viz. the land of the king of the north (Dan. 11:36-45). This land lies to the north-east of Israel and was, during various times in history, referred to as Babylonia, Assyria, and Syria. It is presently known as Syria and Iraq, but its heartland is in Iraq. That is also where the ancient city of Babylon is situated, which is now being rebuilt. Isaiah 10:12-14 and 20 also refers to this end-time Assyrian, from whose tyranny Israel will be saved during the coming day of the Lord.

World government

The Antichrist will institute a dictatorship which will be based upon political, religious and economic power bases. In all three these areas total control will be practised with a view to depriving all people of their basic human freedom. They will have no political rights, religious freedom or economic liberties outside the structures of his new world order. He will declare himself to be God in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem and order the execution of all people who refuse to worship him or his image (2 Thess. 2:4; Rev. 13:15). Buying and selling by all economically active people will be controlled by instituting a cashless, computerised economy for the whole world (Rev. 13:16-18). The allegation by some people that there will never be any

danger attached to a cashless economy, and that the number and mark of the Antichrist should not be taken literally, is part of Satan's propaganda campaign to prepare people on accepting the future number system of the Antichrist, and to conclude a covenant with him.

The philosophical principle upon which the Antichrist will base his global system of religious, political and economic governance is *monism – everything is one*. It is obvious from the prophecies that the Antichrist will be heading a new world order based on the concept of unity. In terms of religious unity it will be argued that all religions are one and that all people should worship the same, universal messiah (Rev. 13:4). The concept of political unity will pave the way to the unification of all people behind one leader (Rev. 13:4,7). Economic unity will justify the institution of a global economy, which will be centrally controlled by one government for all nations. The ideology of *all is one* paves the way to the emerging antichristian new world order.

It is obvious that a Christian world-view is diametrically opposed to the monistic philosophy of the Antichrist. The Bible does not teach us *monism – everything is one*, but *dualism – everything is two*. There are two major and irreconcilable realities that confront a person, i.e. the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. They are totally polarised and implacably opposed.

The final attack against the kingdom of Christ by the Antichrist, the false prophet and their hordes will occur during the battle of Armageddon. They will deploy a multinational army in the Middle East in an effort to utterly destroy the remnant of Israel, and also to await the coming of the true Messiah on the Mount of Olives and to try and fight against Him. But that will lead to the eternal doom of the Antichrist and the false prophet (Rev. 19:19-21), and also the binding of Satan (Rev. 20:1-3). Then, Christ's promised millennial reign on earth will be established.

Personal commitment

Evangelical Christians must resist the rise and planned revelation of the Antichrist. We are the light of a dark world and should oppose the powers of darkness in faith. Although we will not be on earth during the time of the Antichrist, we must resist the preparations for a world government and an alliance of world religions as antichristian institutions. The Antichrist's ideology of political, religious and economic globalism, as well as his culture of sin in which everything is permissible (2 Thess. 2:3), are posing a real threat to Christians' rights and is already being embraced by most governments. I commit myself to warning other people against these reforms and unitary thinking, and to order my own life strictly in accordance with biblical principles.

Questions

1. Will the Antichrist be a person or an impersonal system?
2. From which country or region will the Antichrist come?
3. With which world empires will he be associated?
4. Describe his role as a false prince of peace.
5. What will be the power bases of the Antichrist and how will he punish those who refuse to submit to his authority and demands?

20. The Judgement Seat of Christ

It is important that Christians are not only spiritually motivated to go to heaven one day but that right now, here on earth, they should lead fruitful lives by doing works that befit repentance (Matt. 3:8). The Lord will judge and reward these works after the rapture, and then it will be clear what the spiritual value of every Christian's life was. We will have to give account of what we have done with our talents and opportunities in the service of the Lord.

Peter says, "the time has come for judgement to begin at the house of God" (1 Pet. 4:17). When He comes, Christ will reward our works (Rev. 11:18; 22:12). To the martyrs in the church of Smyrna Jesus promises a crown (Rev. 2:10). To His faithful witnesses in apostate Thyatira, He says that they will rule with Him (Rev. 2:25-26). To His beloved servants in Philadelphia who kept on serving Him despite their great poverty, He says that they should hold fast what they have, that no one take their crown (Rev. 3:11). By their perseverance to the end, they must remain worthy to receive crowns (Gal. 6:9; 1 John 2:28; 2 John 1:8). Believers have a solemn responsibility to be ready for their appearance before Christ at His judgement seat!

The appointment

All Christians have a definite appointment to appear before the judgement seat of Christ – whether they were faithful servants or not. Some of them will receive rewards, while others will stand there empty-handed. The fact is that the servants of the Lord will have to give account of themselves (2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:10,12). On that day, many of the works of believers will prove to have been worthless with no value for eternity. The Lord Jesus says to every church in Revelation: "I know your works..." (Rev. 2:2,9,13,19; 3:1,8,15). He will reward every member according to his works.

To the Corinthians, Paul explains in much more detail how God will test the works of believers by the fire of His judgement. From the context it is clear that the works of faith that were done after salvation are to be tested, but that the works of some believers will nevertheless be found to be carnal and will therefore be rejected. Paul also clearly indicates that, as co-workers of God, we have a definite task to perform in the kingdom of God. But we must beware how we do it – not in the wisdom of the flesh but in the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:8-16). A few important points are quite evident from this passage:

- The foundation of repentance, which is the beginning of the new life in Christ, must first be laid in our lives before we can work for the Lord.
- After repentance we are commanded to work for the Lord by being His witnesses and thereby make our lights shine in the world. We must be fellow workers with Him in the extension of His kingdom.
- We cannot assume that all we do for the Lord is done under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and therefore acceptable to Him, since we may also do worthless works that emanate from the carnal human nature (1 Cor. 3:1-3). These works are the wood, hay and straw that have no value for eternity and will be burned up.
- To those who do unacceptable works in the power of the flesh, the question is asked: "Do you not know that... the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16). They should dedicate their lives to the control of the Holy Spirit and start serving the Lord in His power. That is the normal Christian life.

In a parable in Luke 19:11-27, the Lord Jesus also referred to the day when His servants will have to give account of their lives. He says that to each of them money was given, which refers to a God-given gift to work in His kingdom, i.e. the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. The command to the servants: "Do business till I come" (Luke 19:13) means: "Manage the affairs of My kingdom till I come." When He returns as King He will first summon His servants to see what they have earned through labour. To the one who made ten-fold profit He will say: "Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities" (Luke 19:17). Another one gets authority over five cities, while the one who kept the money given to him unused will appear before the Lord empty-handed and be strongly reprimanded because of his uncommitted life.

The basis of judgement

The Lord has an appointment at His judgement seat with all those who belong to Him. It is obvious that they will not be judged on the basis of the presence or absence of faith in their lives. They are all saved through grace by faith, and that is a gift of God. Because they are all believers the basis of judgement is something else, and that is the works of faith. These are the works that must emanate from a living faith (Jas. 2:26).

Paul states very clearly in Ephesians 2:8-9 that we are saved by faith, without works. No one can earn his salvation by working for it. Salvation is a gracious gift of God. But when a person has been saved and became a believer, it is expected of him to lead a life of devotion and good works (Eph. 2:10). The Lord will not reward us for what we are doing *for* Him but only for what He is doing *through* us. We should be used by Him. What we do, must be in the power of the Holy Spirit. We must not rely on our own ideas but acknowledge and consult God in all our ways (Prov. 3:5-6). The following five crowns are promised to overcomers:

The imperishable crown for a holy life. The race of life in which we are involved is likened to the race of an athlete (1 Cor. 9:24-27). Athletes see to it that they remain healthy – they eat the right food and do not smoke or drink. In the race of life we must also be spiritually nourished and refrain from harmful (sinful) habits that can impede our progress (Heb. 12:1). A commitment of this nature leads to spiritual cleansing (2 Cor. 7:1) and being filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18). Sanctification and a commitment to serve the Lord call for self-discipline and the exercising of oneself to godliness (1 Tim. 4:7). Paul says: "I discipline my body and bring it into subjection" (1 Cor. 9:27). For a sanctified, dedicated life, I will receive an imperishable crown – not like the athletes, who competed for a perishable laurel-wreath and only a short moment of glory.

The crown of rejoicing for soul-winners. The Great Commission that Christ gave to His disciples is that of world evangelism. We have all been sent out to proclaim the gospel (John 20:21; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8). For those who lead other people to Christ, the crown of rejoicing is promised (1 Thess. 2:19). This is a highly esteemed calling in the kingdom of heaven, which is why soul-winners are compared to shining stars (Dan. 12:3). They are also, from God's perspective, described as wise people (Prov. 11:30).

The crown of glory for faithful pastors. The spiritual care and building-up of the congregation is a very important aspect of Christian service that was commanded by Christ Himself. If the pastor discharges all his duties in an honest, dedicated and exemplary way, he will receive the crown of glory from the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:2-4). One of the reasons for the great falling-away of the last days is that faithful and able pastors who rightly divide the word of truth, are very scarce. The majority will, for the sake of popularity and also under the influence of colleagues who are false prophets, follow the way of compromise by proclaiming an easy but false gospel message (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

The crown of life for Christian martyrs. To everyone who lays down his life for the sake of his faith, the crown of life is promised (Rev. 2:10). Through the ages there were always faithful servants of the Lord who were prepared, at the cost of their own safety, their work, their families and even their own lives, to hold the flame of faith aloft in a hostile world (Luke 10:3; John 16:33). During the past almost 2000 years, Christians were indeed, in many countries, persecuted, driven away, scoffed at, intimidated, incarcerated in convict settlements and torture camps, while millions were killed for their faith. The Lord will reward them with the crown of life for the price they paid to be His witnesses among cruel and revengeful people. The Lord will reward them. Included in the category of martyrs are those who suffered trials, testing, afflictions and temptation other than being persecuted by fellow men (Jas. 1:12). Trials of this nature are varied and may be related to poverty and bereavement, physical disabilities, the caring for disabled, sick or poor ones, etc. Such people will be rewarded by the Lord with the crown of life if they remain faithful. Some receive deliverance from their afflictions in this life, and some not. The most important thing is that they must remain faithful to the end (2 Cor. 4:16-18; Heb. 11:3-5).

The crown of righteousness for those who love His appearing. To love the coming of the Lord, calls for the pursuing of things with eternal value. You must lay up treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. If you say that you love the appearing of the Lord Jesus, you clearly imply that He is your King, that you are involved with the establishing and extension of His kingdom on earth, and that you are looking forward to the day when He will be revealed as King. In the meantime you are a stranger on earth, as your eternal home is not here. Paul fought the good fight of faith in proclaiming God's kingdom in a heathen world. Shortly before he was executed for his faith, he again expressed his strong expectation of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and of the crown that will be given to him "on that Day" (2 Tim. 4:7-8), referring to the coming Day of the Lord during the tribulation period. By then, the true church that escaped the judgements of God, will be in heaven where they will first appear before the judgement seat of Christ.

Personal commitment

The great purpose of my life is to remain true to the Lord who has sent me out as His witness. I am intent on fulfilling His commands by doing works that befit repentance. To the honour and glory of His Name, I wish to receive rewards for faithful service at His judgement seat. I realise that works of this nature can only be done in the power of the Holy Spirit, and with that end in view I pray for a fresh anointing by the Spirit of God. It is only when He empowers me that I can do works that have value for eternity. Service to the Lord is often conducted under very difficult and strenuous circumstances

. But in the light of our heavenly reward we do not become discouraged while suffering for Christ (Heb. 11:24-26). Since only the Lamb is worthy to receive the glory for everything that was achieved in His Name, these crowns will be laid down at His feet (Rev. 4:10-11). May the Lord keep me from appearing before Him on that day empty-handed, as that will be the shameful proof of an unfruitful life.

Questions

1. Will unsaved people also appear before the judgement seat of Christ? Give reasons.
2. What will be judged before the judgement seat?
3. Why are works important in a Christian's life?

4. For which crowns do you aspire and exert yourself?
5. What does the Lord expect from pastors of congregations?

21. The Millennium

The Bible clearly teaches a future, one thousand year reign of Christ from the restored throne of David in Jerusalem. This coming dispensation is referred to as the Millennium. In Revelation 20:1-7 the thousand-year reign is mentioned six times.

A future kingdom on earth

When the Lord Jesus comes back to earth it will be as “King of kings, and Lord of lords” (Rev. 19:16) to set up a kingdom for the entire world (Rev. 11:15). In a major end-time prophecy Daniel likened Christ’s Second Coming to the effect of a great stone smiting the kingdoms of the world, pulverising them to chaff carried on the wind, then becoming a great mountain filling the whole earth, replacing them with His kingdom (Dan. 2:34-35; 44-45). Zechariah says that He shall be King over all the earth (Zech. 14:9). This is similar to the prophecy about the Lord Jesus reigning as King, which was given before His birth to Mary (Luke 1:31-32). The throne of David is not in heaven but on earth. Jesus does not reign in a literal sense from the throne of David now as this throne has, since the Babylonian captivity, been temporarily in suspension. Christ will restore this throne at His Second Coming and then reign from it (Acts 15:16-17).

The elders in heaven (the glorified saints) are aware they will return with Christ and reign with Him in His earthly kingdom (Rev. 5:9-10; cf. 2 Tim. 2:12). It is therefore clearly evident that the events of Revelation coincide with a strong proclamation of the Kingship of Jesus Christ (Rev. 12:10). When Jesus, our High Priest who now intercedes for us at the throne of the Father, returns to earth, the power and influence of Satan here will be broken and the kingdom of Christ established. The devil will then no longer be the ruler and god of this present evil world (John 14:30; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 6:12; 1 John 5:19).

A further proof that the millennial reign is not in heaven is that in this dispensation there will still be inherent carnality and disorderliness among the nations, which will necessitate that they be ruled with a strong hand. Although Satan will be bound and prohibited from deceiving the nations into committing rebellious deeds, they will still have fallen natures that need to be disciplined. In Revelation 12:5 and 19:15 it is plainly stated that Christ will rule the nations with a rod of iron. His faithful servants will also share in this rule (Rev. 2:25-27).

During the Millennium, the throne of the Lord Jesus in Jerusalem will be meeting-point between heaven and earth, and therefore a centre of divine wisdom, authority and a government of righteousness (Isa. 2:2-4; 24:23; Zech. 8:22). A situation such as this, in which no wars are waged, no military training is done and no weapons are manufactured, has never before prevailed on earth. It can only apply to a future reign of peace. Since the devil will be bound during the thousand-year reign of Christ he will be unable to deceive the nations, and there will be neither violence nor warfare. Other forms of sin will also vanish and the whole world will recognise and practise the Christian religion exclusively (Isa. 11:9). Even the animal creation will benefit and predation will cease (Isa. 11:6-7). Jerusalem will be spontaneously recognised as capital of the world by all people, and no hostility or political tension will prevail between individual nations (Jer. 3:17).

Laxity will be the only form of misconduct that will occur as some nations will neglect their duties to serve the Lord as they should. It will still be a matter of “the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak” (Matt. 26:41). Their neglect will give rise to rebukes from the King and punitive measures (Zech. 14:16-17).

During this time there will be an unsaved remnant of the nations on earth who will be mortal people of flesh and blood. Due to their sinful nature they will still have to be saved to truly belong to the Lord Jesus. According to Zechariah 14:16-17 they will survive the great tribulation and the battle of Armageddon. Although they did not receive the number of the Antichrist they also do not belong to Christ until they have received Him as their Saviour. The Bible indicates that a small remnant of Israel and the nations will be saved directly after the Second Coming of Christ (Zech. 12:10-14; 13:1,9; Matt. 24:30-31).

That means that the Millennium will begin with a first generation of Christians. Because mortal people will still have their Adamic nature which is inclined to sin, new generations will, as now, be born unsaved and will need to be born again spiritually to become children of God. To evangelise them, will be the task of the Jewish evangelists of Israel who will also be mortal but saved people. They will gather a harvest for the kingdom of God among all nations (Isa. 27:6). A study of Revelation 20 clearly reveals that in course of time fewer members of the upcoming generations will be saved. When the devil is released after his captivity of one thousand years, millions of unsaved people will be drawn to him and fall into his power (Rev. 20:7-9).

The first resurrection

The doctrine of the two resurrections is also clearly related to the Millennium. Only those who have part in the first resurrection (Luke 14:14; 1 Thess. 4:16), including O.T. believers and those saved during the tribulation, will rule with Christ. The resurrection of the just must occur before the millennial reign of Christ. To be worthy for it will be a great blessing and something worth exerting yourself (Rev. 20:6; Phil. 3:11-12). The rest of the dead are the unsaved multitude of all centuries, and they will not be resurrected until the thousand years have ended (Rev. 20:5). They will then appear before the great white throne to be judged and condemned to the eternal lake of fire.

Characteristics of the millennial reign

The following are the most important characteristics of the future Millennium:

God will rule on earth through His King of kings, Jesus Christ (Luke 1:31-33; Rev. 19:15; Isa. 11:5-16). The throne of Christ will be in Jerusalem (Zech. 8:22; Isa. 2:2-3; 24:23). His government will be characterised by righteousness (Isa. 1:26-27; Jer. 23:5-6). There will be no warfare (Isa. 2:4; Micah 5:4). Satan will be securely bound so that he cannot deceive the nations (Rev. 20:1-4). The saved remnant of Israel will rejoice in the Lord and evangelise the entire world (Isa. 12:3-6; 27:6; 40:9). They will make the world fruitful (Isa. 27:6) and God will be honoured (Isa. 28:5; Zech. 8:20-23). The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isa. 11:9-10; Hab. 2:14). There will be no disease (Isa. 33:24). People will live healthily to a great age. A 100 year-old person will be regarded as a child (Isa. 65:20-23). Nature will be set free from the bondage of corruption into glorious liberty (Rom. 8:19-22; Isa. 41:18-20). Times of economic prosperity will dawn (Amos 9:13-14; Joel 3:18; Isa. 65:21-23). Harmony will prevail in the animal kingdom because the Lord will make a new covenant with them (Isa. 11:6-9; 65:25; Hos. 2:18).

Israel's position in the Millennium

Israel's position during the coming Messianic era is frequently described in the Old Testament where it is specifically related to the day of the Lord. It will be a time of great blessing, abundance, joy in the Lord and peace on earth. Israel will fulfil its original destiny and potential as a people of God and be a nation through whom He will bless the whole earth. Paul says of them: "Now if their fall *is* riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness! ... For if their being cast away *is* the reconciling of the world, what *will* their acceptance *be* but life from the dead?" (Rom. 11:12,15). Through Israel's fall, by rejecting and crucifying their Messiah, the gospel of reconciliation with God has been offered not only to Jews but to Gentiles also. What a tremendous blessing that is to the Gentiles! How much more will Israel be a blessing to the world in the Millennium as they proclaim the Messiah's praises among all nations! This will be the long-delayed, but grand consummation of this unique nation's destiny and calling as the chosen people of God.

The following are examples of promises about Israel's restoration and glory in the coming Messianic era: Zech. 8:23; Isa. 27:12; Jer. 31:6-7,31,33; Mal. 3:17; Amos 9:11-12,14-15; Micah 7:11; Jer. 31:38,40; 33:6-9,14-16; Isa. 62:6-7; Joël 3:17; Isa. 11:10,12:4, 17:7, 26:1-2, 27:6, 28:5, 30:23,25; Zeph. 3:9. These and many other blessings will be characteristic of the Millennium when the Messiah reigns from the throne of David in Jerusalem. His glorified saints will rule with Him and righteousness will prevail on earth. Israel will play a leading part in world affairs and will be God's special representative nation among all the nations of the world.

Let us eagerly expect the Millennium that will commence after the coming of the King, Jesus Christ. Only He can save the remnant of Israel and of the nations (Zech. 12:10; Matt. 24:30-31), bind and incarcerate the devil (Rev. 20:1-3), restore the throne of David (Acts 2:29-30; 15:16-17) and change everything on earth for the better. If we are prepared to suffer now and serve the Lord in the face of much opposition (Acts 14:22), we will accompany Him during His triumphant return (Zech. 14:4-5) and reign with Him on earth (2 Tim. 2:12).

Above all, the most important thing about the millennial reign is that our Lord Jesus will be completely vindicated and glorified on this very earth where He "went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil" (Acts 10:38), yet was so disgracefully humiliated, despised, rejected, cruelly cast out as worthless and crucified by the fallen creatures that He, as Creator, had made. God's answer to this is that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess Him as Lord (Phil. 2:6-11).

Personal commitment

I believe the promise of a future millennial reign of peace on earth, and for that reason I am not disappointed that similar conditions do not prevail on earth during the present dispensation of the church. I fully realise that now we are strangers and sojourners in a world which is to a large extent dominated and manipulated by evil powers. For that reason, we are not kings but soldiers of the cross. We are looking forward to the time when the Lord Jesus will return to earth as King of kings, when we will be revealed with Him in glory (Col. 3:4). By then, the restored Israel will all be saved and serve the Lord with a pure heart among all the nations. Like Abraham, we have a vision of the city which has foundations (the new Jerusalem), whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11:10). What a heavenly expectation to embrace, and how much more should we be dedicated to serving the Lord and doing works that have value for eternity!

Questions

1. When does the Millennium start and how long will it last?
2. What does the Bible say about the future kingdom of Jesus Christ on earth?
3. What will the position of Jerusalem be in the Millennium?
4. What will be the most important task of the saved Israel in the Millennium?
5. What will the glorified Christians do during the Millennium?

22. Principles of Dedication

We conclude this Bible study by reviewing a few basic principles of a successful spiritual life, with a view to impressing these great Scriptural truths upon the hearts of diligent followers of Jesus Christ.

Confession of sins

We are living in times in which very little attention is given to fallen humanity's biggest problem, which is sin. The argument is often advanced that as Jesus Christ has died for our sins, all sins have automatically been forgiven. Christ has indeed paid the penalty for the sins committed by all people (Isa. 53:5; Eph. 1:7; 1 Pet. 2:24), but these sins have to be confessed before they are forgiven (1 John 1:9). The confession of sins implicitly implies the forsaking of these wrongdoings (Prov. 28:13) by which we contravened God's law of love (Matt. 22:37-39; Rom. 13:8-10).

Christians can still sin (1 Cor. 10:12; Jas. 3:2; 1 John 1:8) and when they do, Satan is quick to accuse them before the throne of God (Rev. 12:10). But if they immediately confess and forsake these sins, their Advocate, Jesus Christ, who forgives all confessed sins because of His atoning death on the cross, refutes the accusations of Satan by virtue of the fact that the price has been paid and that the particular Christian's relationship with God has been fully restored (1 John 2:1-2).

We should be very sensitive to sin and heed the voice of the Holy Spirit when He convicts us of sin (John 16:7-8). If we wilfully sin and resist the warnings of the Holy Spirit, we will grieve Him (Eph. 4:25-32). When we see that other Christians have yielded to temptations and thus grieved the Spirit, we must admonish them in a very sympathetic but straightforward way (Gal. 6:1; Heb. 3:13), lest they backslide further and become entangled by sin (Heb. 12:14-15). Sin must immediately be acknowledged, confessed and forsaken (Ps. 32:5; Col. 3:8-9; Heb. 12:1,4). If we really love the Lord we are committed to hating sin (Ps. 97:10; Prov. 8:13).

Andrew Murray (*Living the new life*) says: "The one counsel concerning sin is, bring it daily to the only One who can take it away, God Himself. You should learn that one of the greatest privileges of a child of God is the confession of sin. Through confession I must hand over my sin to God, lay it down before Him, and get God's acquittal of it. I must cast it into the fiery oven of God's holy love which burns against sin like a fire. God, yes, God Himself, and He alone, takes away sin. The Christian does not always understand this. He has an inborn tendency to want to cover sin, or to make it less, or to root it out only when he desires to draw near to God. He tries to conceal sin

with the fruits of the works he has done or still hopes to do. Young Christian, if you want to enjoy the peacefulness of complete forgiveness and a divine cleansing of sin, see to it that you correctly use the confession of sin. In the true confession of sin you have one of the most blessed privileges of a child of God, and one of the deepest roots of a powerful spiritual life.

- **Let your confession be a precise one.** The continued, uncertain confession of sin does more harm than good. Begin with one sin. Let it be fixed with you that this sin is, through confession, placed in God's hands. God, in Jesus Christ, frees us from sin. You will experience that in such confessions there is both power and blessing.
- **Let the confession be a righteous one.** Deliver up the sinful deed to be laid aside. Confession implies renunciation, the putting off of sin. Give up sin to God, who forgives you of it, and cleanses you from it. Do not confess if you are not prepared or if you do not heartily desire to be freed from it. Confession has value only if it is giving up of sin to God."

In his concluding remarks, Andrew Murray says that the major hindrances in the way of the confession of sins are (a) ignorance about sin, (b) fear to come with sin to the holy Father, (c) the endeavour to come to God with something good, and (d) unbelief in the power of the blood of Jesus and in the riches of His grace. He also stresses the fact that sins must be confessed immediately, without first desiring to make it less. You must come in full sinfulness to God. The question is also addressed whether it is necessary to confess sins before people? It is indispensable to do so if your sins have been committed against them (Jas. 5:16).

Complete and immediate forgiveness is promised to those who confess their sins and put their trust in the atoning work of Jesus Christ (1 John 1:9). He destroys the works of the devil in our lives (1 John 3:8). Thanks be to God who gives us the victory over sin through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:57).

Wholehearted commitment to Christ

Helena Garratt (*The threefold cord*) said the following on our commitment to Christ:

"One is your Master, *even* Christ" (Matt. 23:8 KJV). So many Christians try to please the world, try to please the church, try to please self, and only try a little to please Jesus. Dismiss all other masters but Christ. Life becomes wonderfully simple when you have only one Person to please.

The Lord Jesus said: "Come to Me... and learn from Me" (Matt. 11:28-29). You cannot learn from Jesus *away* from Jesus. Follow Him and learn from Him through His Word (John 5:39) and through His Holy Spirit (John 16:13-14). This is an age of learning. If a person has no learning he is not highly regarded. To be esteemed in this world we must learn science, languages, arts and various skills, for every kind of learning is prized today, except learning about Christ. All around us there are those who are considered well educated, who have never been in the school of God. Yet this is the only learning that God sets any prize on: "Let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I *am* the Lord" (Jer. 9:24).

It is only when we are near Christ that the greatness of love outshines the love of greatness. We must turn our eyes away from all else towards Jesus (Heb. 12:1-2). He must be the centre of our lives and all our activities – also in the church. The most important question is not how much work is being done, but how much is the Lord Jesus doing through us. "The fire shall try every man's work" (1 Cor. 3:13). Only the work done by Jesus through us will stand the fiery test before His judgement seat. Let us be full of the love of Christ.

The cross of Jesus

“Christ died for our sins” (1 Cor. 15:3). “My theology now,” said the dying C.H. Spurgeon to a friend, “is in four little words: Jesus died for me.”

If we wish to be true followers of Christ we must always glory in the crucified Christ by closely identifying with His death on the cross (Matt. 16:24; 1 Cor. 2:2). Rev. P. Jones said: “The further we drift from the cross, the less passion for souls we have – whether we drift in doctrine or in practice.” Charles Finney said: Where shunning the cross begins, true religion ends.”

The cross is an instrument of death – our old man must be put to death so we can become conformed to the death of Christ on the cross (Rom. 6:1-6). We must die to self and to the world (Gal. 6:14). The cross also enables us to practice continued self-denial (Luke 9:23). We cannot live a Christian life that will please Christ without cost to ourselves. Rev. E.W. Moore said: “Our inability to bear suffering is the weak side of our Christian life.” Andrew Murray said: “We are taught to expect suffering: the cross is the symbol of our faith, and the Man of sorrows is our leader.” Cross-bearing is no more popular now than it was when Jesus went to Calvary.

Beware of distortions of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The world and the devil have always advocated a religion without a cross. But to true disciples of Jesus the cross is at the core of their faith and therefore the power of God (1 Cor. 1:17-18; Col. 1:19-20).

Faith

Without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). True faith is imparted to us by God through the work of the Holy Spirit when we hear or read the gospel message. We are then spiritually enlightened and enabled to put our trust for salvation in God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ (Ps. 13:3; Eph. 5:14; John 14:1). The unbelievers are those who do not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour (2 Cor. 4:4). Even though they “believe” in idols, the Bible does not regard them as believers because they do not believe in the only true Saviour of the world. The Lord Jesus promised that He would send the Holy Spirit: “And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin... because they do not believe in Me” (John 16:8-9).

Bowen said: “Do you not see that the sin of unbelief is a peculiar sin? It is this, and this alone, that shuts the gate of the kingdom of heaven against you, and the terrible thing about this sin is that its life is a life of slumber. It makes no noise in the heart and has no visible shape. An angry word spoken reverberates in the depth of your heart, but unbelief is simply a state and does not ordinarily reveal itself by any symptom. It is the atmosphere in which you move, and as you never moved in any other, it does not shock you. But it is the sin of sins, and until you learn to hate it above all other sins there is little hope of your deliverance from sin. The way to war with all other sins is to war with unbelief, for the life of every sin is hid in unbelief, and if you slay this sin, you slay all.”

All the trouble that ever came into the world came by two things – listening to the lies of the devil, and disbelieving God. And every conceivable blessing comes by the exact opposite of these two actions – turning a deaf ear to the devil’s lies and fully believing God. Underestimate God and you will overestimate your foes. Do not try to deal with Satan yourself. That is the Lord’s work. The only attitude God ever tells us to take in regard to the devil is to resist him (Jas. 4:7). Satan must go when the Lord bids him depart, and he will not go before.

Temptation is repulsed when it meets living faith, that is Christ in the believer. Temptation cannot overcome faith – it is always mastered by faith. But when temptation meets doubt, it easily enters through this doorway of Satan and overcomes doubts.

“Faith thrives best in a heart wholly empty and forever empty of all self-righteousness, all self-defence, all self-help and all self-hope” (Dr. Whyte). Oswald Chambers said: “Faith that is sure of itself is not faith! It is only faith that is sure of God that is faith.” A lack of faith was the one thing for which Christ reproached His followers (Matt. 17:19-20; Mark 4:40; Luke 18:8). The disciples asked the Lord to increase their faith (Luke 17:5). Our faith must indeed be strengthened and built up (Jude v.20).

If God has a big task to be performed, He entrusts it to a person with strong faith. Not our merit, our skill, our talents, but our faith determines our receiving big assignments from the Lord. Faith lets God do it all. As co-workers of God (1 Cor. 3:8) we must have faith in God, also in the most difficult circumstances, and discipline our bodies while serving the Lord (1 Cor. 9:27; Rom. 6:13). Stockmayer said: “In the spiritual life we learn to walk in naked faith, in closest communion with God, never turning back to the life of feeling for one moment. Faith launches out on the bare Word of God, separated forever from the emotional life.”

God’s guidance

“The Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding; He stores up sound wisdom for the upright... When wisdom enters your heart, and knowledge is pleasant to your soul, discretion will preserve you; understanding will keep you, to deliver you from the way of evil... Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths” (Prov. 2:6-7,10-12; 3:5-6; cf. Ps. 23:3).

Helena Garratt says: “When the path is set before us, and we are in doubt as to the source of leading, we should invariably wait, for God is never in a hurry, and where the leading is powerful, hurried and persistent, we may be sure that God is not in it. Place the matter before the Lord Jesus in a simple prayer, and leave it there. If the heart is true, He will unquestionably remove the conviction, if of Satan, but maintain it if of Himself. Never be in a hurry! We may have to wait long for an answer; but do not, on this account, despair, and think you have not been heard, for God’s time is His own; Satan’s is not; and in all my experiences there is not one instance where God has hurried me to a conclusion. The golden rule is this: Convictions of God remain, like the knowledge of salvation, but impressions of all kinds fade away after prayer and patience if Satan is at work. Satan is continually interfering; God seldom.”

It is only when we cease to consider our own inclinations that we can know true guidance. “There is but one thing that matters: it is that God’s will must be done (Rom. 12:1-2; Phil. 2:13). The ultimate issue will be perfect compensation for all the toil of the pathway that leads thereto” (Dr. Campbell Morgan). The Lord usually leads us one step at a time. Since we are not to bring ourselves home, we are not marking out the path and do not need to know all the detail of the Lord’s future guidance. We must just keep near Him and follow wherever He leads us (Ps. 25:12).

Do not be anxious about the way before you; it is the way that God will choose. When you have to make decisions, do not act until you have prayed about the matter and have the peace of God in your heart that your decision is the right one (Phil. 4:7).

Resisting our adversary

The power of the Holy Spirit was not only given to us for boldness to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in a hostile world (Acts 1:8), but also to resist the devil (Eph. 6:10-11) and fend off the attacks of many other adversaries (1 Cor. 16:9). We must indeed expect much opposition because we are engaged in a battle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. E.C. Millard said: “If you and I don’t get any opposition in our work, we may well get down on our knees and say, ‘Now, Lord, I am having a prosperous time – there must be something wrong.’ Beware of

having prosperity without opposition! If a soul is filled with the Spirit of God, then, whether he is high or whether he is low, Satan says, 'I must do all I can to oppose that Christian.' Let us ask God to fill us with the courage of the Holy Spirit."

Dr. A.B. Simpson never sought nor expected an easy life. He said: "What would we think of Jesus if we ever found Him looking for His own pleasure and consulting His own comfort?" The only crown a faithful servant of Jesus Christ will ever get from the world, or from a carnal church, will be a crown of thorns.

The devil also attacks the prayer-life of Christians in an effort to induce them to stop praying. A.P. Wilkes said: "How often as we pray do we feel the insistence of the foe, that wall of opposition, the dullness of feeling, the silence of our God, the inability to find access, the persuasion that praying is to no purpose. These are the oppositions of the adversary. A determined presentation of all that the blood-shedding of the Saviour secures, pleaded in faith, will enable us to break through and drive back and make us more than victors in the conflict." We must take up the shield of faith (Eph. 6:16), which is a firm trust in the victory of the Lord Jesus on Calvary, and resist all the evil thoughts of unbelief, materialism, rebellion and discouragement which the Evil One tries to impose on us. No place must be given to the devil in our lives (Eph. 4:27). It is easier to keep the enemy out than it is to expel him after he has gained entrance.

The world is fast approaching a time, in the coming tribulation period, when Satan will be cast down on earth, having great wrath against the inhabitants of the earth, because he will know that he only has a short time before the Lord Jesus will return to destroy the kingdom of darkness on earth (Rev. 12:7-12).

Personal commitment

I have a clear vision of the intensity of the struggle between the kingdoms of God and Satan. I also realise that the main area of the battle is in the hearts and minds of human beings on planet earth. Satan intends to gain supremacy by deceiving most of the people into rejecting God's plan of salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He induces them to walk according to the deceitful lusts of their fallen nature. I commit myself to strengthening my relationship with the Lord Jesus by an unwavering faith in Him. I look away from my human frailty and rely solely on what He can achieve through me. I will daily take up my cross and follow the crucified and risen Saviour on the way in which He leads me. I realise the vital need of waiting on the Lord for guidance, while praying about and carefully considering every move I intend making in my life. I will subject myself to God, put on the whole armour of God, and resist the devil who relentlessly attacks the disciples of Christ with a view to disabling them spiritually and discouraging them to continue serving the Lord. I look forward to the coming of Christ and the great victory that He will achieve over the powers of darkness.

Questions

1. Describe the role of Jesus Christ as our Advocate with the Father.
2. What is the significance of the confession of sins?
3. What is a wholehearted commitment to Christ?
4. Why is the cross described as the symbol of Christianity?
5. Explain the role of faith in a Christian's life, and also describe unbelief.
6. How can Satan mislead you into deviating from God's path for you?
7. Explain how the devil attacks Christians and how we can resist him.