

Balanced Christian

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BALANCED CHRISTIAN

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1

The Balanced Christian

One of the greatest needs in Christian life and ministry is BALANCE. A.W. Tozer said, "Truth is like a bird; it cannot fly on one wing!" I had a problem in my left ear and the doctors called it Menier's disease. That at times caused imbalance and it was terrible. Truth is parallel. Dr. Campbell Morgan said, "The whole truth does not lie in It-is-written, but in It-is-written and It-is-written- again" (See Mt 4:6,7). The second text must be placed over against the first to balance it and give it symmetry. Error need not be untruth. Many times it is partial truth or one aspect of the truth. Ministries can have various emphases but emphasis should not lead to eccentricity. We should not emphasize one truth at the cost of the other" Eccentricity has been the root cause for many cults. Exccentricity or extremism leads to seclusion and superiority complex. The victim begins to think he or his group has a revelation of a particular truth which no one else has.

Jesus was a very balanced person as we meet Him in the Gospels. For example, look at His growth in Lk 2:52" He grew physically — "in stature" as well as intellectually — "in wisdom;" and spiritually — "in favour with God" — as well as socially — "in favour with men." He is the Son of God as well as the Son of Man.

Here are ten vital areas where we need balance.

1. Love of Go d and Wrath of God

Someone said, "God is too loving to send anyone to eternal hell." The other person answered, "At the same time God is too holy to allow a sinner into Heaven!" For a broken and repentant sinner the love of God must be presented. For a stiff-necked person the wrath of God must be stressed. Apostle Paul balances this twin characters of God beautifully in Romans 11:22. "Consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you goodness, if you continue in His goodness," Jesus spoke about the love of God in John 3:16 but about condemnation in verse 18. He preached both about Heaven and Hell. Even in His Great Commission Jesus included both. "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mk 16:16). There are simply too many pictures portraying Christ as the gentle Shepherd with a rod of comfort. But the picture of Christ driving out businessmen from the temple with a whip is very uncommon. When the wrath and holiness of God Are not sufficiently stressed there will be no fear of God. This explains why there are all kinds of atrocities in churches and ministries. The love of God and the wrath of God are inseparable on the Cross. There God manifested His maximum love and maximum wrath. A minister who speaks only about the love of God will produce spurious

converts and the one who speaks only about the wrath of God sad Christians.

2. Old Testament and New Testament

Both the Testaments together make the Word of God. The two Testaments are the two lips of God. The New Testament is concealed in the Old and the Old is revealed in the New. Jesus said, “Every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old” (Mt 13:52). All the doctrine in the Bible have their origin in the Old Testament but they are fully developed in the New. That’s why Paul wrote to Timothy, “All Scripture is profitable” (2 Tim 3:16). It is true that the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament are no more binding on us but we have rich lessons from the OT examples. Referring to this Paul wrote, “Now all these things happened to them (Israelites) as examples, and they were written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Cor 10:11). At the same time we should understand the extent of application of any OT passage. Otherwise legalism will set in. We must “rightly divide the Word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15). Reading through both the Testaments once a year or once in two years is a healthy practice. A basic study of Dispensations is a must, but we should also avoid extreme dispensationalism.

3. Life and Ministry

Life first, ministry next — is a good slogan. But both are equally important. John the Baptist was a “burning and shining” lamp (Jn 5:35). “Burning” is what happens in a person and “shining” is what goes to others from a person. One is life and the other is ministry. We should both live the Gospel and proclaim the Gospel. Being a

witness means both being and speaking, life and lip. One is not complete without the other. Sanctification that does not lead to service has missed the whole purpose. “Sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work” (2 Tim 2:21). The disciples were not perfected when Jesus commissioned them to go. They had unbelief, disunity, inquisitiveness into other people’s matters and all that kind. They had to wait only for anointing and not for perfecting. This does not mean we should overlook sin in the ministry. No, but we should not hesitate to minister for the Lord saying we are weak and imperfect. Please go through the Bible to find one perfect minister. God is our Potter and we are just clay and we are still in the making, until Christ comes. If we miss this truth we will go about wearing the perfectionist glasses and every active minister of the Gospel will look like an awful sinner to us! At the same time, neglecting one’s life and running about with ministry will have disastrous results. Both ourselves and the kingdom of God will suffer heavy loss. Paul rightly said, “I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1 Cor 9:27).

4. Fruit and Gifts

Christians can be broadly classified as charismatics and non-charismatics. One group emphasizes the gifts of the Spirit and the other the fruit of the Spirit. But both are important and necessary. There was immorality and carnality in the Corinthian Church but they came short of no gift (1 Cor 1:7;3:3; 5:1). Paul did not immediately decried their gifts. On the other hand he said, “Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts” (1 Cor 14:1). When Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit, He did both deeds of love and acts of power (Acts 10:38). Spiritual gifts are not a

barometer of one's spirituality. It is possible a to speak in tongues or prophesy or perform miracles without love (1 Cor 13:1-3). Therefore those through whom God manifests His gifts must diligently search their lives and walk in all godliness. Otherwise the name of the Lord will be blasphemed. God does not quickly withdraw His gifts when we go astray. But this should not be mistaken as God's tolerance or overlooking of sin in our life. He is patient. "Do you despise the riches of His ... long suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads to repentance?" (Rom 2:4). Again, the observation of misuse of gifts has driven many to turn totally against gifts. But the remedy for misuse is not non-use but proper use. "Let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Cor 14:40). Galatians 5:22,23 speak of the virtues of the Spirit-filled life and 1 Corinthians 12:7-10 of the gifts of the Spirit. Jesus said every tree shall be known by its "fruit." Here the word "fruit" means outcome or benefit, which includes both the virtues and the gifts.

5. Bible Meditation and Prayer

We speak to God in prayer and He speaks to us through His word. A balanced devotional life must thus be a conversational relationship with God. In the whole armour passage in Ephesians, the Word of God is presented as the Sword of the Spirit and prayer as the sharpener of all the armour (Eph 6:13-20). Both are equally important. People who spend a lot of time in prayer but neglect Bible meditation are prone to deception. Several false and funny doctrines have followed forty days of fasting by some leader or preacher. What was wrong? While fasting the man didn't spend sufficient time with the Word and so he was caught up in some deception in the spirit world. When the devil suggested to Jesus to turn the stones into bread to satisfy

His hunger, Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God!" (Mt 4:4). In other words, "During My days of fasting I was feasting on the Word of God!" At the same time anyone who neglects prayer but spends all his time in mere Bible study will be puffed up and ending in spiritual dryness. "Knowledge puffs up" (1 Cor 8:1). The purpose of Bible study is to know God and worship Him duly (Psa 138 :2). The meditation of the Word enhances our prayer and worship and vice versa. Extra-Biblical revelations are dangerous and so kneeling before God in prayer and worship with our Bibles open is the safest devotional pattern.

6. Prosperity and Adversity

Sometime ago it was thought the deeper the poverty the greater the spirituality. Now the pendulum has swung to the other side! Radio, television, magazines and pulpits are filled with the prosperity message. Some prosperity preachers have gone to the extent to say, "If you are saved you must be healed and prosperous!" Well, both the extremes are wrong. God balances the life of His children with times of prosperity as well as adversity. No man of God in the Scripture was otherwise. But in all situations they learnt to be content and praising the Almighty. Paul said, "I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!" (Phil 4:12,13). Faith is not to be thought as a magic power to get whatever we need, or living in want and suffering an indication of poor faith. Hebrews chapter 11 strikes a good balance. By faith they "received" as well as "offered." By faith they "prospered" as well as "suffered." Please read

the entire chapter. “Night and day” continue to be God’s original plan (Gen 1:5). Job had a balanced theology: “Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity? In all this Job did not sin with his lips” (Job 2:10). Hear what Solomon the wise said: “In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: Surely God has appointed the one as well as the other!” (Eccl 7:14).

7. Discipline and Liberty

During a particular period in Israel’s history, “there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judg 17:6). God has placed leaders in the New Testament Church for the growth and well being of the saints. “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls” (Heb 13:17). At the same time the leadership should not become dictatorship. Paul was right when he wrote, “Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand” (2 Cor 1:24). The New Testament church is neither a democracy nor dictatorship. It is a joyful blend of accountability and personal freedom. People don’t grow or blossom when there is no freedom. Some Christians are afraid to do anything without the permission of their pastor or leader. The New Testament does not teach this kind of leadership. Children will grow wholesome only when there is both discipline and freedom at home The Boy Jesus was submissive to His parents and at the same time free to be about His Father’s business (Lk 2:49-52). The spiritual life of many believers is stunted and they suffocate because of their popish leaders. “Stand fast in the liberty by which Christ has made us free ... For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Gal 5:1,13).

8. Local Church and Frontier Missions

God has placed Evangelists and Pastors side by side in the ministers’ list of Ephesians 4:11. But there is always a tension, and friction between these two ministers. The Evangelist's slogan is “Go!” and that of the Pastor is “Come!” One is a tensile force and the other compressive. Both must work in cooperation for smooth functioning. When we fold our hand our biceps contracts and the triceps stretches and when we stretch our hand it is vice versa. What a beautiful picture of operation in cooperation! This is how the members in the Body of Christ must function. The mission of the church is missions and the mission of the missions is Church planting. One exists for the other. They are not competitive but complementary. The mobile ministers, namely Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, are mentioned first and then follow the residential ministers, Pastors and Teacher. What does this mean? The evangelist is a quarryman and unless he blasts the rocks and brings in the boulders the pastor will not have raw material to work with — for his fine chiseling work! Paul was a frontier missionary and his team was a missionary organisation. They were supported by the local Churches (Phil 4:15,16). Pastors should not be afraid that their funds will decrease if people are exposed to missions. This is simply an unfounded fear. God loves and blesses the missionary-minded Churches. Also missions should not think of themselves as independent bodies but an extension of the local churches. Jesus predicted two things: “I will build My Church” and “The Gospel shall be preached to all Nations!”

9. Evangelism and Social Concern

Jesus fed the people both spiritually and physically. He forgave their sins and healed their diseases. But the

order is important. First, preach the Gospel, and then, heal the sick (Mt 10:7,8). The Gospel is both spiritual and social. It is “glory to God: and good will toward men” (Lk 2:14). The Cross means reconciliation with God and with man. Reconciliation includes love, concern and care. Apostle James Said, “Faith without works is dead” (Jas 2:17). By works he meant acts of charity. “If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, Depart in peace (Evangelistic blessing!), be warmed and filled, but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?” (Jas 2:15,16). While the Apostles in Jerusalem sent forth Paul and Barnabas as missionaries to the Gentiles, they told them to “remember the poor” (Gal 2:9,10). We will be judged not only for the sins of commission but also sins of omission. The sin of omission is generally what we fail to do to the needy and suffering (Mt 25:41-46). A leper can go to heaven but not a sinner. Therefore the priority is always preaching the Gospel But the other should not be neglected. In the words of Jesus, “These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone” (Mt 23:23). Medical evangelism and literacy evangelism should not be decried by direct or pulpit evangelism. All should function in harmony with mutual recognition and appreciation.

10. Present and Future

There are some who insist on the fulfillment of several eschatological promises right today. Others are content to be hoping of a glorious future at the second coming of Christ. The first group calls the second as futurists. I believe most of the New Testament promises have both a present and future fulfillment. For example, take the subject of holiness. We can be “purified” today but will be

“perfected” only at the coming of the Lord (1 Jn 3:2,3; 1 Thess 5:23). Similarly the question of healing. We can enjoy the benefits of Calvary only to a certain extent in our bodies today. But the full benefit will be enjoyed at the redemption of our body which we await (Rom 8:23). Disease or death is not totally eradicated today. The “last” enemy that will be destroyed is death (1 Cor 15:26). Then the day will dawn when there will be “no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying” (Rev 27:4). Another subject of interest is the kingdom of God. The spiritual kingdom is already “within us,” but the literal one is still in the future (Lk 17:21; Rom 14:17; Mt 6:10; 2 Tim 2:12). This balanced understanding of the present and future fulfillment of the Scriptural prophecies and promises will keep us from many doctrinal errors prevalent today.

Here’s a promise of God for balanced Christian life. Isa 30:21, “Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, This is the way, walk in it, whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left!”

2

The Studying Christian

The greatest gift of God to man, next to His Son and His Spirit, is the HOLY SCRIPTURES. Dr. Oswald J. Smith said, Our attitude towards the Scriptures settles everything. All that we see today are temporal, but with one exception — the Bible! Heaven and earth shall pass away but God's Word shall remain forever (Mk 13:31).

Jesus is the perfect pattern for our earthly life. Both His life and ministry were saturated with the Scriptures. Even while agonizing on the Cross, He said, I thirst, “that the Scripture might be fulfilled” (Jn 19:28). Job testified, “I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food” (Job 23:12). God honours those who honour this Word and despises those who despise His Word. “Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children!” (Hos 4:6). The greatness of Israel was in their possession of God’s Word (Dt 4:8). God has magnified His word above all His Name! (Psa 138:2)

Without the Bible we have no light or direction in this world of darkness and chaos (Psa 119:105; 2 Pet 1:19). Where did we come from? Why are we here? Where are we going? These are questions puzzling even the best of minds. But the Bible answers all these questions without a shadow of doubt. Dr. Billy Graham once said, “I am an optimist because I have read the Book of Revelation!”

All great men of God are men of the Bible. D.L. Moody was called it man of one Book! There was a great demand for his marked Bible. George Muller was once asked about the secret of his great faith. He replied, “I claim to have no gift of faith but I have read the Bible on my knees alone 48 times. Everytime I read my Bible my faith grows!” C.T. Studd during his closing years of missionary career in Africa was one day reading in a dimlight an old copy of the Bible with great difficulty. “What are you doing?” asked his friend. “I am again turning the pages of the Scriptures to find if there is any commandment I have not cared for!” was the answer in a faltering voice. Hudson Taylor (1832-1905), that great missionary to China, spent several hours each morning with his Bible. It is my conviction that an average believer today does not spend sufficient time with his Bible. This explains why there are so many spiritual pygmies in our churches (1 Pet 2:2).

Pastors and preachers should not aim at producing sermon-tasters but sincere and hard-working students of the Scriptures. Guidance to personal Bible study and informations concerning the study aids available must be given to the congregation. Jesus taught His disciples the Scriptures and at the same time He commanded them to “search the Scriptures” themselves (Jn 5:39). We have too many Thessalonians and too few Bereans! No doubt

the people at Thessalonica were receptive to the Word but those at Berea went one step further. "They (the Bereans) received the Word with all readiness, AND searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). Therefore the Bereans were "more fair-minded" than the Thessalonians!

Get a bold letter Bible of a good translation. The King James Version is excellent but the present generation cannot understand its language easily. We should choose a translation suitable both for our meditation and communication. The New King James Version follows the KJV style but uses modern English. The New International Version and the New American Standard Version are faithful and easily readable translations. The Living Bible is essentially a paraphrase and so it should not take the place of a translation. The Amplified Bible may be used alongside to find various shades of meaning of the Hebrew and Greek words in original. These are two very energetic languages and so finding one exact word in translation for several words of these two languages has been quite difficult. The KJV, NKJV, NIV and NASV are good for memorisation. Stick to one and refer to the rest.

There is an abundance of study aids today for which we have to thank God. Majority of Christians will have no opportunity to study thank God. Majority of Christians will have no opportunity to study in a Bible Seminary but that need not be mourned as a disadvantage today if only one will give himself to disciplined study using the available aids. I never had the privilege of studying in a Bible College but my self-study with the help of several study aids, sitting under the umbrella of the Holy Spirit, all these years, has been rewarding. It is not less spiritual to refer to the works of other men of God for our study. God has

given "teachers" to the Church for its maturity and growth. Teachers can both be "heard" and "read." They may be of the present or the past. Paul was original but Timothy was commanded to teach others what he learnt from Paul and they in turn others and so on (2 Tim 2:2). The chain was thus to continue. The students, who listen to a Chemistry or Physics Professor who says he never refers to any text book or reference book but speaks from his own knowledge, are sure to fail!

Each Christian should possess at least one Study Bible. The *Scotfield Reference Bibles* one of the oldest and the original notes of Dr. C. I. Scofield are very helpful. His reference system is excellent. His interpretation of the Scripture is dispensational. The Scofield Bible is available in KJV and NIV. Then we have the *Thompson Chain Reference Bible*. This was published by Frank Charles Thompson in 1934. This is excellent for topical studies. This Bible is also available in KJV and NIV. The *Dake's Annotated Reference Bible* is another monumental work, completed by Finis Jennings Dake in 1963. This contains both notes and references and facts are given in great detail. The Dake's Bible is available in KJV only. Of most recent scholarship is the *Ryrie Study Bible*. Dr. Charles Caldwell Ryrie published this great work in 1978. This is again a Bible with notes and references and one will greatly benefit from God's gift to Dr. Ryrie to explain even the most difficult passages of the Scriptures in simple words and short sentences. This Bible is published by the Moody Press in KJV, NASV, NIV and NKJV. The *NIV Study Bible* of the Zondervan Bible Publishers is excellent and the notes are very explanatory. This is a combined work of many Bible scholars under the leadership of Kenneth L. Barker. The *Criswell Study Bible* by Dr. W. A. Criswell and the

Rice Reference Bible by Dr. John R. Rice are good Study Bibles also. The Thomas Nelson Bible Publishers have brought out the *Open Bible* in KJV and NKJV. The Cyclopedic Index is an excellent feature in this Bible.

The Study Bibles mentioned above are sometimes said to be very expensive. But compared to what we spend on our food, clothing and shelter, it's nothing. Let's remember, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Mt 4:4).

We must use Bible Concordances very freely. Three Concordances are known worldwide. They are, *Cruden's Complete Concordance*, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* and *Young's Analytical Concordance*. The adjectives — complete, exhaustive and analytical — are suggestive of the nature of each concordance. For a very serious student the Young's Concordance is a must, but for average use the Cruden's Concordance is sufficient. These three are based on KIV. Concordances help not only to locate a particular verse but also to pick up all the references on a particular subject. Sometimes one wonders at the amazing knowledge of a preacher when he quotes so many references for one subject. But one should not forget that these things are possible essentially because of the Concordances. Preachers should freely tell the people how they prepare sermons and what study aids they use, and so on. They should not think they will go jobless if they let out these "trade secrets!" Unless we are free and open, we cannot produce Timothys and Tituses.

D.L. Moody said, The Bible is the Bible's best complementary. This does not mean we should not refer to commentaries. Again, as I said earlier, the God-given

"teachers" (Eph 4:11) in the Church may be both "heard" and "read," present or past. One of course need not accept all the views of a commentator. But just because one or two things he says are contrary to our belief, we should not throw away the whole. We must learn to swallow the flesh and spit out the bone! Growing in discernment is the work of the Holy Spirit whose "anointing" is upon us to guide us what to receive and what to reject (1 Jn 2:26,27). For example, considering the authors of the Study Bibles, Scofield, Thompson and Ryrie are all non-Pentecostal and Dake is Pentecostal. There is so much of helpful material in both the schools. The main point we must ascertain is whether the author or the commentator is basically evangelical in faith.

The *Matthew Henry Commentary* is one of the oldest and it is liked by for its devotional quality. The Bethany House Publishers have done an excellent job of producing the *Bethany Parallel Commentary* which contains the three classic commentaries, namely Matthew Henry, Jamieson-Fausset-Brown and Adam Clarke in three parallel columns. The work in two volumes, OT and NT, is a valuable possession. The Dallas Seminary Faculty have produced the Bible Knowledge Commentary in two volumes and it is brief and excellent. Similarly the notes of C. H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) known as the Prince of preachers, may be freely consulted. There are still so many other Commentaries. Consult your pastor or a sound evangelical leader before buying one.

Another aid to Bible study is the Bible Dictionary. A Bible Dictionary gives the details and background of the persons, places, animals, birds, incidents, habits, festivals, etc., of the Bible. The Dictionaries also give a detailed background for each book of the Bible. *The New*

International Dictionary of the Bible, *The New Bible Dictionary*, and *The Unger's Bible Dictionary* are some of the well-known ones. A person who regularly refers to the Bible Dictionary will have more knowledge than even one who has visited the Holy Land several times! The Bible Handbooks are also very helpful. A Bible Atlas may be added to this list.

It is not enough if we just buy these study aids, we must use them REGULARLY. We should set aside study hours a daily or weekly basis and work hard. Apostle Paul instructed young Timothy to “give attention to reading” (1 Tim 4:13). Whatever course of study you choose, you must overcome the temptation to leave it in the middle unless it is unprofitable. Thank God for a Book of lifetime occupation!

It is important our head knowledge of the Scriptures becomes the heart experience. A lad was praying for his dad repeating the words, “Lord, lower one foot!” The pastor who overheard him asked him what he meant. He answered, “I am praying for my dad who knows the Bible cover to cover, but it’s all mere head knowledge. I am praying that the knowledge may come down by one foot to reach his heart!” Yes, beloved, mere knowledge puffs up (1 Cor 8:1). The threefold purpose of Bible study may be stated thus: What does this passage tell about GOD? About ME? About my responsibility to OTHERS? Learn to apply the answers to these questions in the actual life situations. The Bible is intensely practical. If we are not “doers of the Word,” we are simply deceiving ourselves (Js 1:22). Our life and ministry will be judged and tested by God’s Word on the last day (Jn 12:48; Mt 7:24-27; 1 Cor 3:12-14).

There are some who hold the view that the Bible just contains the Word of God. We totally reject this view. We believe and hold that the Bible IS the Word of God. Also the Bible is a completed revelation. With the “Amen” of the Book of Revelation, the Scripture is complete. What is revealed is sufficient for our life and conduct. Beware of extra Biblical revelations!

I cherish this chorus learnt in the Sunday School:

*The B-I-B-L-E,
Yes that's the Book for me;
I stand upon the Word of God,
The B-I-B-L-E!*

3

The Doctrinal Christian

A crowd pulling evangelist once thundered, “Why talk about DOCTRINE? Let's talk about Christ!” Though this sounds spiritual, it is certainly not scriptural. The Bible speaks about the “doctrine of God” and the “doctrine of Christ” (Tit 2:10; 2 Jn 9). Of the fourfold profit of the Scriptures, the first one is “doctrine” (2 Tim 3:16). The early church was an ongoing, increasing and growing church because they continued steadfastly, first in the apostles’ “doctrine” and then in fellowship, bread-breaking and prayers (Acts 2:42).

Paul has predicted one of the significant signs of the last days as, “The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine ... but will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables” (2 Tim 4:3,4). Are not these days upon us already? What we hear from many pulpits is all stories and not the Scripture, lot of fables

but not the facts. In many sermons Scripture verses are sprinkled here and there but the content is a very poor stuff. These are the days predicted by Amos the prophet. “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord God, that I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord” (Am 8:11). There is a famine for sound doctrine but a flood of false doctrine. As God pours out His Spirit the devil opens out his flood of deception. But for those who desire to stand for God on His side, there is a glorious promise. “When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against him” (Isa 59:19). What is the “standard?” It is “the Word of God that abides for ever” (see verse 2:1). God’s Word in the mouth of God’s people is the perpetual standard against the floods of satanic teaching. “... your mouth ... the mouth of your descendants ... the mouth of your descendants’ descendants!”

The enemy came in like a flood on Christ in the wilderness. His primary attack was on the integrity of God’s Word. So in the power of the Spirit the Lord Jesus lifted up a standard against him saying, “It is written ... It is written!” The first temptation to our first parents was to doubt God’s Word. “Has God indeed said?” (Cen 3:1). Because the devil is primarily against God’s Word, our primary weapon against him also is God’s Word. Of the whole armour of God in Ephesians 6:13-17, the only offensive weapon is “the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.” The standard of the Spirit!

I would offer here five simple counsel how one can escape false doctrine and embrace sound doctrine.

1. Cultivate a spirit of childlike simplicity and obedience.

God has no regard for the one who approaches His Scripture as a learned professor. “Whom will He teach knowledge? And whom will He make to understand the message? Those just weaned from milk? Those just drawn from the breasts?” (Isa 28:9). To what extent we realize our emptiness and ignorance to that extent will He reveal His truth to us. We are to study God’s Word just like newborn babes desiring milk (1 Pet 2:2). This does not mean we should always be childish in our life but our desire for God’s Word should be like a newborn baby crying for milk. The heart attitude is what God considers to teach His Word. Jesus said, “If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine...” (Jn 7:17). A commitment to “do” God’s will is the condition to “know” it! A mere desire to increase our head knowledge is not pleasing to God. Because, the ultimate purpose of all doctrine is to produce a sanctified life. “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you” (Jn 15:3). “God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered” (Rom 6:17). Paul admonished Timothy to avoid any doctrine which did not lead to “godly edification which is in faith” (1 Tim 1:3,4). Any doctrine from God makes us live holier, draw closer to Him and love others more. Here then is an important test to identify sound doctrine.

2. Place the Scriptures above all experiences.

We must be objective and not subjective. Peter had one of his most exciting experiences on the Mount of

Transfiguration. But he values more the written Word of God, even the prophecies of the Old Testament, to prove the Messiahship of Christ. Read his narration carefully in 2 Pet 1:16-21. “We did not follow cunningly devised fables ... but were eyewitnesses of His majesty ... And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. We also have the prophetic word made more sure, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place.” In other words, Scripture first and experiences next, however real. While writing on the Gifts of the Spirit Paul said, “If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant” (1 Cor 14:37,38). In other words, spiritual experiences must submit to scriptural truth, otherwise there will only be ignorance and confusion. We should never establish a truth from our experience but examine our experiences in the light of the truth. Not experience to truth but truth to experience. What a great confusion in spiritual circles these days because this principle is violated!

In Matthew 22:23-37 we have an interesting illustration. The Sadducees presented to Jesus a case in which seven brothers one after the other’s death married the same woman and finally she also died. They asked Jesus, “In the resurrection, whose wife of the seven will she be?” In other words, they said, “If there would be a resurrection, each one of the seven would claim her as wife, and what a confusion it would be!” This is how people try to establish a truth from an experience. What was Christ’s answer? “You are mistaken (or deceived), not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection

they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven!" Let's not twist the truth to fit our experience.

3. Be balanced and avoid extremes.

Bible truth is like a bird which can fly only if it has two wings. It is like two rails or the two sides of a coin. It is not enough to say, "It is written," we must balance it by "It is also written!" (Mt 4:6,7). Here are a few examples for balancing the truth —

Some preachers preach all the time on the love of God. Others are vexed with it and they go to the other extreme to always thunder judgment like Jonah or John the Baptist. Both the extremes are wrong. Apostle Paul beautifully presents the balanced truth, "Consider the goodness and severity of God; on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness" (Rom 11:22). Then there are groups and Churches who always talk about gifts, gifts, and tongues, tongues! And the other camp always talks about fruits and they carefully avoid any reference to charismatic gifts. Both the groups are wrong. The Bible says, "Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts" (1 Cor 14:1). Again, there is now a wave and wind of prosperity teaching. Once upon a time poverty was considered to be a mark of spirituality and now the pendulum has swung to the other extreme. Both the views are wrong. See what the wisest, richest and most prosperous man ever lived has to tell us. "In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: surely God has appointed the one as well as the other!" (Eccl 7:14). God of balance! For some it is only preaching the Gospel that is necessary and they have no concern for people's physical needs. For others it is always soap and soup only. Both the groups have missed

God's purpose. Jesus said, "preach the Gospel and heal the sick." Evangelism and social concern! Not either or but both. One more example — some preachers emphasize the doctrine of holiness and perfection to such an extent that they demoralize and demotivate those who desire to be active in soulwinning and evangelism. They tell them, "Why preach to others when you yourselves are not perfect?" The other group least bothers about your personal life as long as you are "active" in the ministry. Again extremes. Look at the Biblical balance: "Sanctified and useful for the Master" (2 Tim 2:21). We are not sanctified for showcase but service!

Here's help to maintain balance. Don't always be listening to an evangelist or a pastor or a particular minister. One of the reasons several Christians don't grow these days is that they always hear evangelists only. An evangelist is a blaster, a quarryman, but not a builder. You must go to a pastor-teacher for being built up. The evangelist blasts the rock and brings in the raw material and the pastors and teachers begin their fine chisteling and polishing work to fit you in the building. You hear lot of noise while blasting but not so much while building! Listen to an Apostle, he gives you the plan and strategy of God. Hear a Prophet and he points you to the righteousness of God. An Evangelist preaches to you the gospel of the grace of God. The Pastors and Teachers feed and nourish and grow you in the flock of God and prepare you for the Kingdom of God. That's why God has provided all these five ministries in the Church — "that we should no longer be children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine ... but may grow up in all things into Him" (Eph 4:11-15).

Endeavour to get the “whole counsel” of God both in your private study of God’s Word and learning from others. For example, read all the four Gospels to get a total picture of Christ. Matthew alone is not sufficient, you need Mark also. In Matthew Jesus is King and in Mark He is a Servant. Similarly in Luke He is the Son of Man and in John He is the Son of God.

4. Follow the principles of Biblical interpretation.

The Bible is not to be interpreted according to our whims and fancies. We must abide by certain principles to get the right message while interpreting. Here are just a few of them—

a) Differentiate between the OT and NT.

The Old Testament was essentially ceremonial but the New is spiritual. The Old Testament must be studied today in the light of the New Testament. All the commandments assume a spiritual value today. “Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith, from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk” (1 Tim 1:5-7). For example there is no law for the New Testament believers for days and foods (Rom 14:5,6). If you want you can observe a day specially to the Lord, or you have freedom to esteem every day alike. If you want you can abstain from certain foods, or you have liberty to eat any food with thanksgiving. It’s up to you to decide. Unfortunately several Christians live only the OT life in these NT days! The regulations — “Touch Not, Taste not, Handle not!” — are all Old Testamental (Col 2:13-23). Let’s not go back! One lady preacher said that God told her that those who would have part in the first resurrection

should not eat meat or sweet. I predicted that she would next talk about savouries! My prophecy came true! Beloved, beware! “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them” (Heb 13:8,9). Also in the OT it was mainly “material” blessings (Dt 28:1-14); but in the New it is “spiritual” blessings (Eph 1:3). In the OT when you give God your barn will be filled with grains (Mal 3:10); but in the New what is guaranteed is “fruits of righteousness” (2 Cor 9:10). There is an utter confusion because believers are not properly taught this important principle.

b) Avoid spiritualizing every detail of a parable or an incident.

One preacher was expounding the story of the Good Samaritan. He said, “One silver coin is the wage for one day. Two coins are for two days. One thousand years are like one day for God. And so Jesus will come after 2000 years !!!” So much and more in one story! Another parable which has suffered most is that of the ten virgins. All that Jesus wanted to teach us was that we should be watchful always because He comes in the most unexpected hour. Spiritualizing the other details of the parable gives rise to many problems and questions. And that becomes the support for false doctrines.

c) Compare Scripture with Scripture.

Scripture explains Scripture. It was D. L. Moody who (1837-1899) said, “The Bible is the Bible’s best commentary!” We are to “search from the book of the Lord,

and read: not one of these shall fail; not one shall lack her mate” (Isa 34:16). Take for example Lk 2:14 and Mt 10:34. In the former it says Jesus was born to bring peace and in the latter Jesus says He came not for peace but sword! How do we explain this, because Scripture does not contradict itself? Jesus gives us peace but the message of peace is so important and urgent that He wants us to stand against anything or anyone standing on our way to proclaim it to others (see Mt 10:32,33,35-39).

d) Get the overall sense of the passage.

One of the modern day perfection preachers quoted Rev 22:11,12 and said, “We need not bother much about those who are not saved. Let them continue to be unrighteous still but let’s be growing in righteousness!” What a message to those who are already at ease in Zion, not bothering about their brother Joseph in trouble! (Am 6:1-6). This passage is nothing but a challenge to the overcomers not to come down to the standards of the world but keep moving forward for the reward. It has no reference to evangelism at all! Someone said, “The Bible suffers more from its exponents than its opponents!” How true! Don’t take a text out of context. It becomes a pretext! There are preachers who are least bothered about systematic preparation of sermons. They simply go to preach because they expect the Holy Spirit to tell them what they should speak! (Mt 10:19,20) Can there be a better example for misquotation? This passage refers to prison, not pulpit! Beloved, when common sense makes sense, don’t look for any other sense!

5. Use reliable study aids.

Paul was discipling young Timothy and he wrote to him, “Give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine” (1

Tim 4:13). We must set aside daily an hour or so to systematically study the Scriptures, besides our devotional meditations. God has used His men of the past and present to provide us with many study aids — Study Bibles, Concordances, Commentaries, Dictionaries and so on. One should freely use all these valuable tools for Bible study. Several passages in the Scripture can be understood only if we know the background of the writer and the people. A good Bible Dictionary is a must here. Topical study is almost impossible without a Concordance. Please refer to the previous chapter for details regarding these study aids.

There are folks who sound very spiritual when they say, “Don’t refer to all these Commentaries and Study Bibles. Just look to God and the Holy Spirit will teach you!” There is a gross error in this view. Apostle Paul was original. He got it all from God by revelation and not from man. But he wanted Timothy to just pass on to others what Timothy had learnt from him. “The things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:2). Think of a Physics or Chemistry professor who boastfully tells his students, “I don’t refer to any books when I come to the class. It’s all my original!” His students are sure to fail. All should not assume to be Einsteins or Edisons!

Someone then asks what Apostle John meant when he wrote, “You do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you...” (1 Jn 2:27). Please look at verse 26 for the answer! “These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you!” Therefore this passage does not refer to the faithful teachers of God’s Word whose concern is to build God’s people.

Beloved, if you keep these fundamental principles you will be safe. Your house will be founded on rock and not sand. Let the winds and floods of false doctrine beat on your house. You will not fall, because you are founded on the rock of God's Word!

4

The Praying Christian

I was born again in 1962 in a PRAYER Fellowship in Nazareth (Tamilnadu, India). The leaders of the Fellowship were mighty prayer warriors and the most important activity of the Fellowship was prayer. One grows fast and strong in an atmosphere of prayer. Over the years I have had the privilege of meeting with several men of God and learning from them and their writings a number of secrets of this heavenly exercise called prayer. The Lord through His Word has led me into many glorious aspects of prayer. I continue to be a student under the Master in His School of Prayer. I have not yet graduated. I am sharing here some of the very simple and basic lessons I have learnt about prayer.

WHEN YOU PRAY ...

1. Acknowledge God's's presence!

When we gather in the Name of Jesus, God is already there in our midst (Mt 18:20). We need not invite Him,

but simply welcome Him! Strictly speaking, God does not come to us in prayer but we go to Him. “Let us come boldly to the Throne of Grace” (Heb 4:16). Sometimes we “feel” God’s presence very much but not always. We should not depend on our feelings. Whether we feel it or not, the fact is we are in the very presence of God. In the Tabernacle, there was sunlight in the outer court and candlelight in the inner court or the holy place, but no light in the innermost court or the holy of holies. One must walk there not by sight (or any feeling) but by faith (2 Cor 5:7). The ground of prayer is the all-holy place. The pathway is sprinkled with the blood of Jesus. You have to just thank God for His presence and go on praying. We are the temple of God and the Holy Spirit indwells us. This is true every moment of our life. Acknowledging the everabiding presence of God with us is the first secret of unbroken fellowship with God in prayer.

2. Address the Father!

Very sadly it has become a fashion today to begin the prayer as “Lord Jesus!” and end it saying, “We ask in Your Name!” Where in the Bible do people find such a teaching, I wonder. Jesus taught to pray TO the Father. “When you pray ... pray to your Father ... pray: Our Father in heaven ...” (Mt 6:6-9). Referring to the Church age after Pentecost, Jesus said, “And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you” (Jn 16:23). The practice of the early Christians was as taught by Jesus. Read their prayer in Acts 4:24-30 and see how they addressed the Father and referred to Jesus as “Your holy Servant Jesus.” The teaching of the apostles in the Epistles is also very clear. “For through Him (Christ) we both have access by one Spirit TO the Father” (Eph 2:18). Paul

testifies, “I bow my knees TO the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 3:14). Eventhough Jesus is the Baptizer with the Holy Spirit, we are commanded to ask the Father to receive the gift (Lk 11:13). Also praise and worship must be primary addressed to the Father. Jesus taught the Samaritan woman to worship the Father, in spirit and truth (Jn 4:23). Read the following references — Eph 3:21; 5:20; Phil 2:11; Col 1:3, 12; Heb 13:15. Can words be clearer? If there are prayers in the Bible after Pentecost addressed to Jesus, it is more an exception than a rule. Also what we read in the book of Revelation cannot be a pattern for us today because the conditions today are different and we are not yet ushered into the literal presence of God where we will see Him face to face. It may be alright for a Sunday School child or a recent convert to Christianity to address his prayers directly to Jesus. “But when I became a man, I put away childish things” (1 Cor 13:11). Learning to pray *to the Father, in the name of Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit*, will keep us from many doctrinal errors and deceptions.

3. Adore the Lord God!

We make a theological distinction between prayer, thanksgiving and praise or worship. But the prayer taught by the Lord to His disciples, which we call the Lord's prayer, contains worship or adoration both at the beginning and the end. “Hallowed be Your name ... For Yours is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever” (Mt 6:9-13). That means, prayer must be enveloped by or saturated with praise. Adoring means “giving” to the Lord whereas asking is to “receive” from Him. Did not Jesus say, “It is more blessed to give than to receive?” As I grow in my relationship with the Lord, during the seasons of my communion with Him, I find myself naturally adoring

the Almighty more than making petitions to Him. Several men of God have shared the same experience. The reason why many believers don't find a release in their worship is that they don't take time to meditate on the character or attributes of God. The chief purpose of Bible Study is to "know Him!" Every page of the Bible reflects any one particular character of God. It is a good practice to keep the Bible open while adoring the Lord. Or you may keep a notebook exclusively to note down the attributes of God as and when you meditate or study the Bible. This notebook will become an excellent companion in your worship. See how David, an excellent worshipper in his time, combines "worship" and the "Word." "I will worship toward Your holy temple ... for your loving kindness and Your truth; for You have magnified Your word above all Your name" (Psa 138:2).

4. Appreciate God's deeds!

"Forget not all His benefits" — is a Scripture verse we invariably say at the close of every prayer. But how easily and often we forget what He has done! When a person remembers or counts all the blessings he has received, one by one, it will surprise him and leave no room for any murmuring. We can thank God all our life for just that one thing called salvation! I consciously remember to thank God everyday for the gift of salvation, gift of the Holy Spirit and the gift of the Scriptures. I thank Him for my justification, reconciliation with God, and sanctification by His Word and Spirit. This naturally leads me to thank Him in anticipation for the final glorification. Next I thank God for the loving wife and the lovely daughter. Everything we have is what we received from God. Our body, our clothes, our house, our God, and everything! "What do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Cor 4:7). We should

never take anything for granted. If we don't appreciate God in prayer for His mighty acts and great gifts, how shall we testify for Him before others? There is nothing more awful than a thankless heart.

5. Allow God to search you!

One should not always be speaking in his prayer time. The early saints used to call the devotional hour as the Quiet Time. Though this does not mean we do no speaking, it does imply the necessity to wait before God patiently and quietly to let His searchlight turn upon us, to bring out from our life all that displeases God. Solomon has given a very wise and practical counsel here. "Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools ... *Let your words be few*" (Eccl 5:1,2). Apostle James's words are also practical: "Let every man swift to hear, slow to speak" (Js 1:19). David prayed, "search me O God" (Psa 139:23,24). The hymn-writer sang, "Take time to be holy!" A hurried visit to the presence of God will not shape our lives. Spending a few minutes each day before we retire to bed to take a stock of how we walked during the daytime, is a healthy practice. Unless we are regular in this, we will unconsciously backslide to a condition of excusing ourselves of several pet sins in our life. The spiritual sensitivity and sharpness of conscience will be lost.

6. Ask in faith!

Apostle James gives in simple words this profound truth: "Let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways" (Js 1:6-8). The remedy for anxiety

is believing prayer. “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer ... let your requests be made known to God” (Phil 4:6). Worry also vanishes away when we trust God in prayer. “Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Pet 5:7). When you find it difficult to believe God in a particular crisis, don't lose heart but simply pray, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief” (Mk 9:24). That will melt the compassionate heart of God. There are times when we feel weak in our faith. The only remedy is to meditate on the Word again and again. For “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom 10:17). Seek the help of the fellow believers and faithful ministers when your faith shakes (Rom 14:1; 15:1). “God has dealt to each one a measure of faith” (Rom 12:3). We should help one another.

7. Avoid vain repetitions!

This is one of the clear lessons on prayer by our Lord. “When you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him” (Mt 6:7,8). “Pray without ceasing” does not mean repeating the words like chanting. Also we don't need to give a lecture to God to explain to Him why we need a particular thing or how we want Him to answer. What a difference it will make in our prayers if only we truly believe that God already knows what we need! Then why does God want us to ask Him? He delights in the conversational relationship of His children. Also by vain repetition one should not mean repeated prayer. Jesus prayed three times in Gethsemane using the same words. Paul prayed thrice for the removal of thorn from his flesh. The heathenic

chanting is what is condemned. “not ... as the heathen do.” An example of vain repetition may be: “Give me Lord, Give me Lord, Give me Lord, Give me Lord...”

8. Arrest straying thoughts!

The devil trembles to see the weakest saint on his knees. He will do all that is possible to distract a soul from prayer. All kinds of thoughts will hoard your mind the moment you begin this heavenly exercise. Arrest the thoughts right at the beginning. Once you start rmeditating on them, it becomes difficult to bring back your mind to concentrate in prayer. Praying aloud is also a helpful solution. Jesus suggested a closet where we can shut ourselves away from the noisy and distracting world (Mt 6:6). We may claim the power the Blood against the disturbing and distracting forces. When I find the distracting thoughts too much to handle, I resort to praying in tongues. When I pray in tongues my mind or intellect is bypassed and my spirit is active (1 Cor 14:14). Some have also suggested a change of posture. Switching over to praise also helps. Or you can sit up to read the scriptures to fill the mind with the Word and then start praying again. In any case don't give up and give the devil a win.

9. Assume a humble posture!

Both in the Old Testament and the New, kneeling has been practised by men and women of prayer. “Solomon ... knelt down on his knees ... and spread out his hands toward Heaven” (2 Chr 6:13). “Daniel ... knelt down on his knees three times ... and prayed” (Dan 6:10). “Jesus knelt down and prayed” (Lk 22:41). Stephen even while being stoned, knelt down and prayed (Acts 9:40). “Paul ... knelt down and prayed” (Acts 20:36). There is nothing wrong to occasionally sit and pray. But it has become

fashionable in many assemblies and churches never to kneel down. I felt very uncomfortable in the Western Churches where they normally don't kneel down. All that is from the West need not be the best. Some argue that what is important is the heart attitude and not the physical posture. This is simply incorrect. Both our soul and body belong to the Lord. The Bible says, "At the name of Jesus every knee should bow ... and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father" (Phil 2:10,11; Rom 14:11; Isa 45:23). Are we going to spiritualize this passage also? Then what will be the meaning of "every tongue should confess?"! Beloved, "Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker" (Psa 95:6). Let us preserve the Bible culture! We all like the "praying hands." Bent knees, bowed head and folded hands help us maintain a spirit of awe and reverence before the Almighty. In addition, the Bible exhorts women to cover their head while praying or prophesying (1 Cor 11:5-10).

10. Accept God's will!

"Ask God for anything and He will give it!" This is not a Bible doctrine. "If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us" (1 Jn 5:14). Again Jesus said, "Whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you" (Jn 16:23). What does this mean? You cannot ask the Father what Jesus Himself would not approve. When you use His name you must have His approval and pleasure over that request. That's what we mean by God's will. God's mind is revealed in the Scriptures. God's Word is God's will. And we must pray being filled with the Holy Spirit. Because, "we do not know what we should pray as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us ... according to the will of God" (Rom 8:26,27). Using the phrase. "If it is Your will," in prayer is no indication of

poor faith. A leper came to Jesus saying, "Lord, if You are willing You can make me clean." He was not rebuked but instantly healed by Jesus (Mt 8:2,3). Jesus Himself prayed to the Father in Gethsemane to remove the cup from Him if it was His will (Mt 26:39). A novel doctrine is becoming quite popular which repeatedly quotes the verse, "Concerning the work of My hands, you command Me!" (Isa 45:11). The exponents of this doctrine teach the people to command God for whatever they need! What a blasphemy! Read the entire chapter, especially verses 9 and 10, and understand the context. God in this passage as the Creator is challenging us His creatures, "Do you or can you command Me?" Beloved, beware of taking a text out of context. A text out of context is a pretext. No doctrine should be developed on any obscure passage in the Scripture. The "whole" counsel of God should be sought. Also sometimes when we pester God, He may grant our request but send leanness into our soul (Psa 106:15). We must be interested in God's perfect will, not the permissive will. Let's submit to God. He is Sovereign!

D.L. Moody (1837-1899) said, "Those who have left the deepest impression on this sin-cursed earth have been men and women of prayer!"

5

The Anointed Christian

We cannot over emphasize our need of the Spirit's power today because so much is attempted by mere fleshly enthusiasm and human strength. In today's Church the Holy Spirit is the most ignored person among the Godhead. Christians are afraid to make even a casual reference to Him lest they would be labelled Pentecostals — as if that matters! God the Father is in Heaven, God the Son is seated at the Father's right hand in Heaven, and it is God the Holy Spirit who in all His personality is here on earth. This is the Dispensation of the Holy Spirit. Any Christian who is not filled with the Holy Spirit is like an orphan (Jn 14:16-18). Oh that our churches may not become orphanages! And those who are filled with the Spirit must live in full enjoyment of this great Promise and Gift of the Father. This Divine Helper must be invited to energize, equip and enable us to accomplish God's purposes in our life in the following areas.

1. To overcome sin!

“You are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you ... For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live!” (Rom 8:9,13). “So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature” (Gal 5:16).

We have to live with our sinful nature till we die but we must live above it and not under! Decisions and determinations not to yield to temptation and sin are good but don't guarantee victory. The Holy Spirit is the Answer. He keeps us holy. That's His primary ministry. Seek God for a fresh filling of His Spirit each morning and stay full of Him throughout the day. When we are full, there is no vacant room for the devil to enter. It was when the evil spirit found the house unoccupied, it brought seven other spirits more wicked than itself! (Mt 12:44,45). Sin has abounded everywhere and the very air we breathe is contaminated. Days are becoming more and more difficult to live pure. “No-to-sin” is not popular. Friends, take a stand. Don't join the devil's majority but suffer with God's minority. Your every effort to resist the temptation will be rewarded. God has made full provision for a victorious life in giving us His Spirit. The Spirit loves the overcomers! (Rev 2:7,11,17, etc.)

2. To live a successful family life!

“Be filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18). Following this commandment are the instructions to wives, husbands, children and parents (5:22 to 6:4). Yes, when hearts of the family members are filled with the Holy Spirit, there is a happy home. It's heaven on earth! There is submission, love, obedience, respect and honour. John the Baptist

came “in the spirit and power” of Elijah to “turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers” (Mal 4:5,6; Lk 1:17). Yes the Holy Spirit sets the house in order.

Zechariah and Elizabeth were a beautiful couple, known for their devotion to the Lord, blameless behaviour before men and an enviable oneness among themselves (Lk 1:5,6,60,62,63), though they were barren (v7). The secret was they were filled with the Spirit (vv41,67). What a consistent married life for so many years! (v18).

The family of Philip was an attractive one. The missionary team of Paul could stay with them “many days!” The secret was the housefolk were filled with the Holy Spirit. Philip was a Spirit-filled deacon and evangelist and all his four daughters were charismatic! (Acts 6:3,5; 21:8,9). It was a tabernacle of the righteous resounding with “shouts of joy and victory” and not quarrels and jazz music! (Psa 118:15).

The Holy Spirit can make the husband a lamb and the wife a dove. What a combination! Discussions but no divisions, differences but no disunity! Home sweet home! The devil comes full steam against this basic unit called family. He began his attack with that first family in the Edenic bliss and now he is accelerating as we approach the end. The Holy Spirit is the insurance against this demonic invasion.

3. To be super at the workspot!

The young man Joseph was in a strange land which was hostile to his holy convictions. The Egyptian culture was to glance this way and that and sin if no one saw! (Ex 2:11,12). They looked around *but Joseph looked above!*

“How can I sin against God?” (Gen 39:9). He was shot with arrows of hatred and envy. But his bow remained steady! Because, the Spirit of God was in him (Gen 49:23-25;41:38). He walked from prison to palace with state honours!

Daniel was another young man with the excellent Spirit of God upon him (Dan 5:11; 6:3). He was on the King’s service in Babylon. He also could not escape envy. Yes, no man is fully accepted until he is totally rejected. Daniel dared to stand and stand alone, not fearing the human king or the king of animals! Everytime he knelt down with praise, alone or alongwith his friends, the Spirit of the Lord fell on him with fresh courage and firm conviction. So he prospered under two heathenic kings without compromise (6:28).

Bezaleel was filled with the Spirit of God and so he became an extraordinarily skilled craftsman. He could engage in all kinds of craftsmanship to make artistic designs in gold, silver and wood (Ex 31:2-5). A Spirit-filled doctor will operate better a Spirit-filled engineer will build better; a Spirit-filled professor will teach better; a Spirit-filled artist will draw better; a Spirit-filled student will study better!

Mental or physical exhaustion leads to tension in office, factory or school. Get a fresh filling of the Spirit and break forth into tongues! “This is the rest with which you may cause the weary to rest and this is the refreshing!” (Isa 28:11,12; 1 Cor 14:21). Both during my student days and while practising engineering, I would often resort to speaking in tongues, quietly of course, and invariably find a release.

4. To overcome relationship problems!

Interpersonal relationship problems stem from a lack of love, pleasant temperament, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. But the Holy Spirit supplies all these abundantly because they are His “fruit” — His very nature and manifestation! (Gal 5:22,23) Submitting to one another is an immediate outcome of being filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18,21). Paul wrote to the Ephesian believers, “Be completely humble and gentle be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Eph 4:2,3). The Spirit produces unity and we are to preserve and protect it!

The Pentecostal outpouring achieved this seemingly impossible thing — “All the believers were one in heart and mind!” (Acts 4:32). Most of the problems in relationship are due to the tongue which “no man” can tame (Js 3:8). But God can! Is this the reason why the Holy Spirit captured the tongues of the hundred and twenty at the first instance? The tongues of holy fire from Above burnt and sanctified the tongues of hell fire of those Galileans! (Acts 2:3,4; Js 3:6).

The Holy Spirit melts rocklike hearts and fills the eyes with tears of reconciliation and restitution. He undercuts the ropes of suspicion and misunderstanding. He convicts and comforts. He liberates and lubricates. He is the precious ointment and the refreshing dew to make “brothers live to gather in unity!” Oh how good and how pleasant! (Psa 133:1,2).

5. To praise and pray rapturously!

The Holy Spirit is called the “Paraclete,” meaning a Helper (Jn 14:26). One of His primary helps is in the area of prayer, because we are all “weak” in it. We know not what to pray and how. The Holy Spirit not only helps us in our prayer but also intercedes for us “with groans that words cannot express” (Rom 8:26). One of the first signs of those baptized with the Spirit is the desire and depth in prayer. The early disciples following Pentecost received a renewed interest in prayer and never missed the hour of prayer! (Acts 2:42; 3:1).

“Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs” burst forth from a Spirit-filled heart. The Holy Spirit excites us to sing and make music in our heart to the Lord, “always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 5:18-20). All Church leaders agree that one of the greatest contributions of the charismatic movement to the church is the restoration of “worship” which A.W. Tozer calls “the missing jewel of evangelical Christianity!” Several Scripture passages are set to music and the traditional and conservative forms of worship give way to spontaneous and joyful worship. Hallelujah is no more a denominational slogan!

Speaking in tongues has a tremendous devotional value in praise and private prayer. It bypasses the mind and boosts our spirit (1 Cor 14:4, 14-17). I spend some time daily in private prayer speaking in tongues since 1962 when I was baptized with the Spirit. It's refreshing! Of the nine gifts of the Spirit listed in 1 Cor 12:8-10, the one primarily directed to God is “speaking in tongues.” Hence its value in communing with God.

6. To understand the Bible!

Jesus said, “The Holy Spirit will teach you all things” (Jn 14:25). Paul wrote, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him — but God has revealed it to us by His Spirit ... This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words” (1 Cor 2:9-13). This is the function of the two gifts which top the list in 1 Cor 12:8-10, “The Word of Wisdom and the Word of Knowledge.”

The Holy Spirit is the best Teacher of the Scriptures because He is the Author (2 Pet 1:21; 2 Tim 3:16). This does not mean we need no human teacher or study aid. The Holy Spirit turns all information to inspiration. He takes it from the head to the heart. Study the Bible under the umbrella of the Spirit. Constantly acknowledge His presence while studying or meditating. Everytime you open the Bible, remember to pray, “Lord, open my eyes!” It is not Spirit-taught or Scripture-taught but Spirit-taught-Scripture.

I recently (1988) met some ordained ministers of a mainline Church who asked me whether I still believed in a literal Heaven and Hell. I answered yes and asked them whether they believed that the Bible is the Word of God. Several of them could not give a yes answer. Our pulpits are occupied more and more by this kind of seminarians. Empty head knowledge with no life of the Spirit! The very basic faith is lost because there is graduation and ordination but no unction! Beware!

7. To evangelize the world!

The last recorded saying of Christ before Ascension was the promise of the Spirit’s power for worldwide evangelisation (Acts 1:8). About the early Christians we read, “They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the Word of God boldly” (Acts 4:31). Paul testified, “My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power” (1 Cor 2:4). Result? Three thousand! Five thousand! Great multitudes! A large number of priests! Many prominent Greek women and men! It was a church explosion! Because they had received the dynamic power of the Spirit!

Let me quote one of my favorite authors, Dr. James A. Stewart. “If there is one thing which has broken my heart, one thing which has caused me to weep, it has been the shallowness of modern evangelism ... Preachers and singers alike are so glamourised that Christ is not the centre of attraction ... The old-fashioned method of angelism was to make people weep, but the modern Hollywood way is to make people laugh. The Holy Spirit cannot work in a frivolous atmosphere ... The solution to our problem is to honour the Holy Spirit and to put away all the nonsense of modern evangelism!”

It is the Holy Spirit who burdens us to weep and pray for the perishing souls (Rom 9:1,2; 10:1). It is the Holy Spirit who calls and sends forth missionaries to proclaim the Evangel (Acts 13:2,4). It is the Holy Spirit who convicts sinners and points them to the Cross (Jn 16:8-11). It is the Holy Spirit who baptizes the believer into the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13). And He joins the Church in calling sinners to Christ! “The Spirit and the bride say, Come!”

(Rev 22:17). Blessed work of the Spirit in evangelism and Church planting.

8. To fight the enemy!

Of the sixfold armour of God five are meant for defense and only one for offense and that is the “sword of the Spirit,” which is the Word of God (Eph 6:10-13). The Holy Spirit guides us to choose the right Scripture verse or passage to speak against the enemy. The reply of Christ to the temptations of the devil was supplied by the Spirit from the Old Testament. The quotation was so sharp and right that the devil could not gainsay! Jesus did it “in the power of the Spirit” (Lk 4:1,14). After mentioning the six-fold armour, Paul immediately writes about “praying in the Spirit” (Eph 6:18).

The devil primarily attacks our mind because true religion resides in the mind alone. He causes doubts, disturbance, distraction, depression and so on to wean the soul from God. “The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to it make obedient to Christ” (2 Cor 10:4,5).

When we are possessed and obsessed with the Holy Spirit we are insured against demon possession or obsession. “When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will put him to flight!” (Isa 59:19).

9. To bear suffering and persecution!

Our bodies are mortal but the Holy Spirit quickens and gives life (Rom 8:11). There is healing in the wings of the

Spirit. His wind revives. He is the Balm in Gilead. Christ healed people in the power of the Spirit (Acts 10:38; Isa 61:1-3). Healing is one of the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor 12:9). Jesus said, “I drive out demons by the Spirit of God” (Mt 12:28). The oil of anointing over the sick is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Comforter. How much we need comfort in sickbed! In all our distresses, the Holy Spirit is also distressed. He lifts us up and carries us like a mother her sick child (Isa 63:9,10).

Then there is persecution which none of us can avoid or escape. Here again the Holy Spirit is our Companion. “If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified!” (1 Pet 4:14). The secret of the radiant face of Stephen under the pelting of stones was “the fullness of the Spirit” (Acts 7:54,55). The expelled missionaries were filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit (13:49-52). “The church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria ... was strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit; it grew in numbers!” (Acts 9:31).

Oh the blessedness of the Anointing!

6

The Soulwinning Christian

We are Christians to make others Christians. We are born-again to win others for the Kingdom. We are God's children to bring others into God's family. We are disciples of Christ to enroll others as His disciples. We are in the Church to Church the unchurched. We are sanctified to show others the path of righteousness. We are going to Heaven and we cannot meet our Lord empty-handed!

Our basic calling is to be **SOULWINNERS**. "Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men" (Mt 4:19). Here is the very first call of Christ recorded in the New Testament. The very purpose of Christ coming to this world was "to save sinners" (1 Tim 1:15). This is "a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance!" He was a Soulwinner, first and last. His very name, Jesus, carries the slogan of salvation (Mt 1:21). His followers cannot be otherwise!

Andrew Murray said, "There are only two groups of Christians: Soulwinners and Backsliders!" This was not

his original thought but he borrowed it from Jesus who said, "He who does not gather with me scatters" (Mt 12:30). The Church is filled with backsliders. If you are not excited about evangelism, if you do not go after souls, you are backslidden. You are cold. The younger son is called the prodigal but I think otherwise. Look at the end of the story. The younger son was back home and the elder would not enter in! Reason? He was not interested in winning the Lost. His was a self-centred religion. A soulwinner's heart weeps and rejoices with the Father's, over the souls. The elder son is a type of backsliders in the Church.

One sometimes wonders why there is no joy in the Church. Everyone is long-faced and there is no excitement or enthusiasm or exuberance. The answer is simple. There is no soulwinning. When the shepherd found his lost sheep he called his friends and neighbours and said, "Rejoice with me!" So said the woman who found her lost coin and the father who found his lost son (Lk 15:1-31). To the shepherd the loss was 1%, to the woman 10% and to the father 50%! The size matters not. Soulwinning excites Heaven with great joy! (vv7,10). One who does not win souls is out of tune with Heaven. Dancing is not Pentecostal. It belongs to all soulwinners! (v25). Von Zinzendorf said, "Our joy until we die is to win men for the Lord!"

The Baptism with the Holy Spirit is not a ticket to enter the Kingdom but an ordination for soulwinning. The last recorded words of Christ before Ascension said exactly that (Acts 1:8). When Christ Himself was anointed with the Holy Spirit He went out soulwinning (Act 10:38). The early Church filled the cities with the gospel and turned the world upside down when they were baptized with the

Spirit. Three thousand souls were added to the Church in a single day. Peter did not stay back as a superintending pastor but was out in the streets making his shadow available to folks! (Acts 5:15). Stephen and Philip were appointed as deacons along with five others for food distribution. But they considered soulwinning as their primary calling. Stephen was out among the people preaching and healing and became the first martyr since Pentecost. Philip was out in Samaria preaching-healing-delivering (Ph.D.) and came to be known as Philip the Evangelist! The entire Church was a band of preachers! (Acts 8:14). Paul's epistles to Timothy are called pastoral epistles but Paul admonished Timothy to "Do the work of an evangelist" (2 Tim 4:5).

The devil will oppose evangelism tooth and nail because it plunders hell and populates Heaven. Throughout history he has been changing his tactics to sidetrack the Church from reaching the unreached. One of his modern tools is the so-called doctrine of perfection. His agents will preach things like these: "Why bother about the outsiders when the insiders themselves are not alright?" "When you yourself are not perfect, why go to preach to another person?" "When the 99 sheep inside are fighting against each other why go after that one sheep?" "He who is holy, let him be holy still. He who is filthy, let him be filthy still. You keep on becoming holier and don't bother about the one in filth." The fallacy of such teaching is obvious. Beloved, beware of such eccentrics! We are sanctified to serve! Moses was cleansed and commissioned! (Ex 3:5,10). So was David (Psa 51:12,13), Isaiah (Isa 5:5-9), Jeremiah (Jer 1:4,5) and scores of others. We are sanctified for the Master's "use" and "every good work" (2 Tim 2:21). Don't become a doll, in the showcase, dusted everyday!

I rejoice over the renewed interest everywhere over the gifts of the Spirit, but I regret that the purpose of gifts is not properly understood by Christians. Gifts are not for those who stay back but who go out. Why do you need the gift to take up serpents, when you are in a mosquito-proof room? You drink only boiled and filtered water, you never go out to villages and places of poor sanitation, then why do you need the gift of drinking deadly thing? Take your gift of healing to remote and uncivilized places where there is no hospital or medical specialist. Over the years I have very carefully observed that greater and genuine miracles of healing happen in tribal villages, among neglected people, through the hands of ordinary men and women than in highly-publicized healing crusades in cities and towns with Hollywood-style evangelists. Go where the need is lest God grieves over the gifts He has bestowed on you.

Slothfulness has been number one enemy for soulwinning. The five-talented man earned another five. Likewise the two-talented man earned another two. But the one-talented man buried it and was severely rebuked by the Master for his slothfulness. We all have talents. If we don't use them we will lose them. Prophet Amos cries out, "Woe to you who are complacent in Zion ... you lie on beds inlaid with ivory ... you strum away on your harps like David ... but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph" (Am 6:1-6). This is true portrait of the Church today. At ease in Zion! Convenience has become the deciding factor in all plans and programmes! Only blessing, no bleeding! Only crowns, no cross! Awake, Deborah! Arise, Barak! God's call is clear to the Church, the sleeping giant! Stop the Sunday evening services for a few months and lead the congregations to stand near cinema theatres, liquor shops, market places and villages and praise and proclaim

God's greatness! Why not? The Church is God's salvation army! Out into the offense! The gates of hell will have to give way! (Mt 16:18). Let's captivate the captives! Most of the believers are suffering from indigestion, because there's no exercise. We sing, *Stand up, stand up for Jesus*, and then sit down! Oh for a revival to stir up the silent majority in the Church and send them out! William Booth said, "Some like to live within the sound of church or chapel bell; I'd rather run a rescue shop within a yard of hell!"

If only each one in the Church could reach one outside, the Church growth will defeat all imagination. Take for example a congregation of just 100 believers. Let's adopt the principle of each one reaching just one person for Christ in a month's time and making him a soulwinner to follow the same procedure. By February it becomes 200, by March 400, April 800, May 1600, June 3200, July 6400, August 12,800, September 25,600, October 51,200, November 1,02,400 and December 2,04,800! Even if you allow for 50% backsliding, we will be still left with a clear membership of 1,00,000! How deplorable our condition is on the face of this statistics! I believe this is how the early Church grew until it was institutionalized and the unscriptural clergy-laity distinction came into existence. All believers are full-fledged priests and kings to offer up and show forth God's praises (1 Pet 2:4-10). According to European Christian Mission, Europe's Churches are losing 4242 members a day including 1627 Protestants. Enough to weep!

A sense of urgency should grip us. Not much time is left. Over 80 persons die every minute. In 1988 I am sure the number was more, with all the earthquakes, floods, disasters and accidents. That means, people are dying at a rate faster than that of the second hand of the clock. Is it nothing to us?

While preaching in Churches I use to ask the congregation a standard question: "What should you do if you want to fish?" Someone will say, "I must buy a fishing rod or a net." Another, "I must get worms for bait." And all similar answers. Rarely would anyone rise up and say, "I must go out where the fishes are!" Yes beloved, GOING is the main thing in soulwinning. Even praying cannot become a substitute for going. Some folks await guidance on knees." They will not move unless God "leads" them to a soul. This is not what we learn from the Scriptures. We must keep "going" and God will do the "leading." A parked car cannot easily be turned! Paul kept on going and God found it easy to turn his direction (Acts 16:6-10). The late musician-singer Keith Green said like this: "Christ has commanded us to go. In the army you must keep doing the first command until you hear the next. Christ has not told us to come back!" God heal our paralysis!

John Wesley preached most of his sermons in the open air. When the Church in Epworth did not give him the pulpit, he stood upon the flat tombstone of his father and preached every evening for a week. George whitefield was a great open-air preacher. My advice to my younger friends is never to hunt for pulpits. Wherever and whenever you meet a sinner, there you have a pulpit and a pew! Jesus the Master Soulwinner preached in the seashore, mountain side, fields and every imaginable place. The apostles got some of their best converts by the riverside or a prison cell. One of the attesting signs of the ministry of Jesus was, "The poor have the gospel preached to them!" The poor means the neglected, downtrodden people of the society. Let's go to them. When an affluent man in the society shows some interest in the gospel, every preacher goes to him saying he is a "good" soul! A few years ago a

cine actor in Madras became an earnest enquirer and he was mobbed by preachers and ministers. The fellow got scared and never got saved! Friends, away with such secret lusts while soulwinning! All souls are equally precious to God.

As much as Christians are interested in mass evangelism, they are not in personal soulwinning. D.L. Moody was a great crusade evangelist but he said, there is nothing like hand-plucked fruit! The laws of a State may ban mass crusades but who can stop person-to-person evangelism? Do you remember the statistics I worked out in an earlier paragraph? And it is least expensive. On the other hand hundreds of thousands of rupees are spent in crusades in India, but the number of non-Christians joining the Church as a result is negligible. More than 90% of the crusade participants are Christians. This is not to decry crusade evangelism but to show the difference.

Let's repent of the sin of evangelising the evangelised, reaching the reached, blessing the blessed, converting the converted, baptizing the baptized, comforting the comforted, and neglecting the neglected! Remember, 80% of India's population is in the 6,00,000 villages mostly unreached. Jesus said, "Whoever serves Me must follow Me; and where I am, My servant also will be" (Jn 12:26). Had Jesus been here in India today, where do you think He will be? If Paul is in India, where do you think he will be mostly found? (Rom 15:20).

Don't be discouraged if the results of your soulwinning efforts are not always good. You go on faithfully sowing the seed. "Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let not your hands be idle, for you do not know which will

succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well" (Eccl 11:6). We are not commanded to "Christianize" the whole world but "Evangelize!" Sowing and watering is our job but giving the increase is God's (1 Cor 3:6).

The rewards of soulwinning are glorious. "He who wins souls is WISE" (Prov 11:30). "He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of JOY, carrying sheaves with him" (Psa 126:6). The folks whom we lead to the Lord will be our HOPE, our JOY, our CROWN and our GLORY at the Return of the Lord! (1 Thess 2:19,20). My mother was an ardent soulwinner. We have epitaphed Dan 12:3 for her. "Those who lead many to righteousness will shine like the STARS for ever and ever!"

7

The Loving Christian

Everywhere we hear about Faith Seminars, Faith Ministries, Faith Teachers, Faith Confession, and so on. But with all these we don't seem to have accomplished much. Why? We have lost sight of a greater virtue called LOVE. Faith is important but love even more. "Now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love!" (1 Cor 13:13). Love is the greatest and at the same time the hardest virtue to manifest.

If faith is the foundation love is the superstructure. "Growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love!" (Eph 4:16). Foundation is important but men use the superstructure only! That's why love is coupled inseparably so many times with faith in the New Testament epistles (Gal 5:6; Eph 1:15; Col 1:4; 1 Thess 1:3; 2 Thess 1:3; 1 Tim 1:14; Phile 5). Christian life means faith and obedience. All the commandments are summarised in two statements: "Love God" and "Love Man" (Mt 22:37-40; Rom

13:9,10). These two are again inseparable. Because, "He who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?" (1 Jn 4:20).

A Christian without love for others is a contradiction. The acid test for rebirth is love for others. "Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God ... We know we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren" (1 Jn 4:7; 3:14). I present here some practical insights concerning love in three vital areas of our life. God is dealing with me in these areas very strongly.

These three areas are like three widening concentric circles. The first one is the family, the next is the Church and finally the ministry we are to fulfill in this world.

1. Love in the Family

Charity begins at home. Our houses must be filled with the fragrance of love (cf Jn 12:3). House is the most important sanctuary in the world. Christ had His last supper in a house. The Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost came down in a house. It was in a house the spirit came for the first time on Gentiles. The early Christians gathered in houses. Their bread-breaking and evangelism was from house to house.

God begins with husbands as He began with Adam. They are to set the ball in motion. If they fail, the entire system goes wrong. Husbands are to love their wives, a) as Christ loved the Church; b) as they love their own bodies; c) as they love themselves (Eph 5:25,28,33). This is absolute, selfless, joyful love. This love is not always easy and automatic. Isaac, a type of Christ, "loved" his wife (Gen 24:67). The Bible need not mention a virtue which flows out effortlessly. Are not the husbands

“commanded” to love their wives? True love is not “because of” but “in spite of!” Elkanah loved Hannah eventhough she was barren (1 Sam 1:5). There is no wife who has never upset her husband. But he should never give place to bitterness, rather keep on loving her (Col 3:19).

Love begets love. Christ loved us first and we love Him in response. A loving husband and a loving wife are a beautiful gift from God. Their love for each other should cover a multitude of defects and shortcomings. Paul wrote to Titus to teach younger women to love their husbands and the children (Tit 2:4). Yes, love must be taught. It is tough! But when love grows cold, division is on the way. It may not be apparent but internal bleeding is more dangerous! A house divided against itself will not stand (Mt 12:25).

When parents live in love with each other, the children get an atmosphere of love for healthy growth. Someone said, The most important thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother! Joseph was so loving and considerate towards Mary both before and after marriage. The Boy Jesus grew in this atmosphere with submission and obedience. As His carpenter father provided for the family, He made a provision for His widowed mother even at His painful death.

Money can build a house, but it takes love to make it a home!

2. Love in the Church

Though the Ephesian Church was sound in doctrine and busy in ministry, Christ severely rebuked the believers of their loss of first love. He even warned He would remove the very church from that city unless they repented! (Rev

2:1-5). Our Churches today are not much different from the Ephesian Church. We have everything but love!

The very purpose of our assembling should be “to stir up love and good works” (Heb 10:24,25). To love one another is God’s message to us “from the beginning” (1 Jn 3:11; 2 Jn 5). We are to forgive, forbear, exhort, encourage, edify, accept, appreciate and pray for one another. “Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Phil 2:4).

The pattern for our love is Christ Himself. “As I have loved you, you also love one another” (Jn 13:34). Jesus knew James and John were ambitious but He continued to keep them in His closest circle. He knew peter was weak but He prayed for him to be strengthened. He knew Judas was covetous but He trusted him with the treasury and gave him sufficient time to change. He understood John was in need of a mother and He gave him His own mother. He knew all His disciples would desert Him at His trial but He told them all the secrets of the Father. His disciples were His friends, including the betraying Judas! Do we have any excuse not to love any one for any reason? It is when we love one another “all men” will know we are the followers of Christ (Jn 13:35).

Our love for the children of God must be sincere and fervent, free from hypocrisy (1 Pet 1:22; Rom 12:9,10). Also we must throw away partiality of all sort. It is natural to be attached to the rich but despising the poor. This is an age-old problem. Apostle James condemned the habit of paying special attention to the one coming into the assembly with gold rings and costly clothes (Js 2:14). He says this kind of partiality is a sin as bad as adultery and murder! Read verses 5 to 11). Casteism is another plague

in the Indian Church. There is neither Greek nor Jew, but Christ is all and in all and we are all one in Him (Col 3:11; Gal 3:28; Rom 10:12). A college student who was converted from atheism to Christianity told me he was “shocked” to find casteism among Christians because he thought it was only pagan! Some of our Churches have celebrated their centenary but they have caste feelings at all levels of their church life. Shame! Why are preachers tight-lipped about this social evil in the Church? Do we still believe that the Church is to change the society?

Some “saints” will love only those who are “spiritual” in their Church. Did not Jesus love both Mary and Martha alike, though the former was very spiritual and the latter concerned about too many earthly things? (Jn 11:5; Lk 10:40-42). How much love do we show towards an erring brother? (Gat 6:1,2). Do we find it difficult to reaffirm our love for a repentant backslider? (2 Cor 2:8). We may be strong in our convictions of freedom and liberty in Christ, but do we offend the weak ones or serve them with love? (Gal 5:13). Do we poke our nose unnecessarily into other peoples’ matters? (1 Thess 4:9-11; 2 Thess 3:11; 1 Pet 4:15).

In the name of truth we excuse our divisions. But the Bible commands us to “speak the truth in love” (Eph 4:15). Because none of us has all the doctrine and practice perfect, we should have no difficulty in embracing any believer, whatever denomination he may belong to. In the early New Testament days there was only one Church per city. But because the situation is quite different today, for reasons legitimate or otherwise, we should freely visit the other Churches in our locality for interaction at whatever level possible. Seclusion in the name of separation is sinful. Exclusiveness is to our own destruction.

One of the practical ways of showing our love for the brethren is to share our worldly goods with those in need. This happened quite spontaneously at Pentecost (Acts 2:44,45). Apostle Paul wanted to test the sincerity of love of the Corinthian believers by their help to the needy brethren (2 Cor 8:8,24). John calls us to “love not in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth” (1 Jn 3:17,18). This is an important condition for answered prayer (vv 19-22).

A Church filled with love is the salt of the earth, light of the world and a city on a hilltop.

3. Love in the Ministry

Jesus Christ came into the world. He sent His disciples into the world. As John Wesley said, the world is our parish. Our ministry to people must be motivated by pure and selfless love. When Jesus saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them (Mt 9:36). It is possible to donate all our goods to feed the poor or give our body to be burnt without love (1 Cor 13:3). This will profit nothing! Apostle Paul wrote about two types of preachers of the gospel one who preached with “envy and strife” and the other out of “love” (Phil 1:15- 17). Shall we check our motive in the ministry? Is it to gain popularity, power and penny? Are we interested in shining without burning? A candle reduces and decreases by burning. John was a “burning and shining” light and his motto was “I must decrease!” Paul belongs to the same brand. “I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved” (2 Cor 12:15). Preachers should not consider people as cows to be milked but lambs to be fed.

I am of the opinion that the gifts of the Spirit do not operate these days to the extent they are talked about, because love is missing. Love is the lubricant and without it there is too much of noise and too little accomplishment. We have become “as sounding brass or a clanging cymbal!” (1 Cor 13:1). There is no scarcity for teaching on the gift of the Spirit. Everyone talks about miracles, but not many lame walk or lepers are cleansed! Back to love, please! Let’s have some Fruit of the Spirit Seminars, please! How about a Love Seminar — without sponsors?

Evangelism without opposition is unheard of. We are to love and bless those who oppose and persecute us (Mt 5:44). The pattern is the Father who gives sunshine and showers both to the good and the evil (v45). He gave His only Son because He so much “loved” the world (Jn 3:16). The Son was crucified but the Father continued to love the world and so gave His one Spirit. We are given this “spirit of love” to face the persecutors (2 Tim 1:7,8).

There is a war between preachers all over the world. I call this the Third world war! The Bible says, “If you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another” (Gal 5:15). God is calling us for a total disarmament. If we are primarily concerned about souls and burdened with deep love for their salvation, there will be no place for competition. It matters not who pounds the paddy provided it becomes rice! We’ll join Paul saying, “Christ is preached and in this I rejoice!” Each minister of the Gospel is precious to God. Let’s handle with care!

8

The Family Christian

President Reagan is said to have remarked in one of his talks that the number one problem in America is broken homes. This is true of every nation. The devil seeks to destroy families because God’s basic unit in creation to accomplish His purposes is the FAMILY. The first song or poetry in the Bible is on the creation of a family (Gen 1:27). Genesis begins with a marriage and Revelation ends with a marriage. The first person to be translated without death was Enoch, a family man (Gen 5:22-24). God preserved the human race in the great deluge through a family, that of Noah. God’s missionary plan which had its beginning with Abraham mentions the blessing of all the “families” of the earth (Gen 12:3). Christ is the Captain of our Salvation and Joshua who was a type of this confessed, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Josh 24:15). Christ came through a family. His ministry and teachings were related to families. His first miracle was in a marriage. He performed the most significant resurrection

miracle because of His love for a family (Jn 11:5). No other parable better illustrates the love of the Father to a repentant sinner or backslider as that of the prodigal son. The great Gospel promise includes the family, even without the enquirer asking for it! (Acts 16:31). The Church is called a family (Eph 3:15). God is called the Father; Christ the Son; Holy Spirit the Helper Believers the Children; Church the Bride; The final eternal union of Christ with the Church is called a marriage; and so on. Yes, family is God's eternal idea.

In this chapter I write about the husband-wife relationship. There are four important ingredients for a successful family life.

1. Friendliness

Husband and wife must be friends! Eve was not created from a skull bone or foot bone but a rib. The idea is walking side by side as friends. The wife is called the husband's "companion" (Mal 2:14). The primary purpose of the book of Song of Solomon is to teach about the pure love between husband and wife. Husbands and wives will read this book alone and together periodically their love will remain fresh and alive. In conclusion we read, "Love is as strong as death" (SS 8:6). Partners exchange love letters before marriage. What happens to such expressions of love after marriage and as years pass by? Love demands time. Partners who fail to spend quality time together are sure to make a shipwreck of their marriage. Husbands should not just "use" their wives. Also hurried sex is selfish and it makes life miserable for the wife. God has designed sex for mutual enjoyment and pleasure. It is never one way. Sarah speaks about man's responsibility to give pleasure to his wife (Gen 18: 12). Again friends love each other not

because they are perfect but love is blind. "Love will cover a multitude of sins" (1 Pet 4:8). "Love covers all sins" (Prov 10:12). A husband or wife who keeps on finding fault with one another has forgotten the definition of love. Love should not be taken for granted. It must be expressed in words and deeds. God so loved the world that He "gave" His Son. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and GAVE Himself for it" (Eph 5:25). Look for opportunities to express your love for your spouse through gifts. There is no one in the world who does not like gifts. Remember the birthdays and the wedding anniversary. When I go marketing I remember to buy some jasmine for my wife. I surprise her with beautiful handkerchiefs or such gifts on her birthday. She does the same and we enjoy such expressions very much. Christ calls the Church as His friends (Jn 15:15). For a family man, his wife comes even before the ministry. The Biblical order is God first, family second and ministry third. The Biblical motto for successful marriage is, "I must please my wife or husband at all cost!" (1 Cor 7:32-34). Even parents of partners should not come in between. Even before there was a mother in the world, God said, "A man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife!" (Gen 2:24). And the commandment to the wife is: "O daughter ... forget ... your father's house; so the king will greatly-desire your beauty" (Psa 45:10,11). Also husband and wife should not love the children more than they love each other (1 Sam 1:8).

2. Faithfulness (Fidelity)

God's perfect plan is one wife for one husband. He gave only one woman to Adam. Christ has only one bride. "Let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband" (1 Cor 7:2). Partners should be very

Careful following the loss of initial excitement in marriage. Physical union is ordained by God but that is not the foundation of marriage. Marriage is first spiritual and then physical. When the order is reversed, infidelity creeps in. Though the deeds, because of social and cultural restrictions, may not be adulterous, the spirit becomes adulterous when the spiritual union is pushed back. “Did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth” (Mal 2:15). The only commandment that is sort of repeated within the Ten Commandments is with reference to adultery. Commandment Seven: “You shall not commit adultery.” Commandment Ten: “You shall not covet your neighbour’s wife” (Ex 20:14,17). Understand God’s serious view of infidelity in marriage. Almost all the New Testament epistles speak against adultery and fornication (Rom 13:1-2; 1 Cor 6:13-20; 2 Cor 12:21; Gal 5:13-21; Eph 4:17-24; Col 3:1-7; 1 Thess 4:3-7; 2 Tim 2:21,22; 1 Pet 2:9-11; 4:1-3; 2 Pet 2:9,10). The seriousness of this sin may be still understood from Christ’s commandment to even “pluck the right eye” or “cut off the right hand” if it offends (Mt 5:27-30). Let me make here a few practical suggestions to remain faithful to your partner. Realize whom God has given you as partner is the best for you. God knows all about us and our times are in His hand and knowledge. We can trust God our Father that He has given us the best “He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favour from the Lord” (Prov 18:22). So thank God regularly for your partner. At any cost avoid comparing your wife or husband with another person. This is extremely dangerous. It is unavoidable that a person’s defects become obvious when we live long enough and close enough with him or her.

Satan tempts us here to dream of a perfect person. His suggestions will be appealing but deadly. Let’s not lust the forbidden fruit. Also don’t reveal the weaknesses of your partner to anyone, especially one of opposite sex. This has led many to the hot bed of adultery. Sympathy from a person of opposite sex is very subtle. Don’t get hooked up unwisely. When you visit families, do go as a family. No saint on this earth is beyond the reach of the devil. We don’t become sin-proof in this world. Whether it is a pastime or delicacies of life, learn to enjoy things together with your spouse. Eve fell when she got out of Adam’s company and started talking with someone else about an attractive fruit.

3. Forgiveness

The Lord’s prayer is sometimes called the Family prayer. How true! In this prayer there is only one request based on a condition. That’s concerning forgiveness. “Forgive us as we forgive others!” Marriage must be A to Z forgiveness, otherwise it hits the rock. Christ said we should forgive even a brother seven times seventy. How much more should we forgive our life-partner! Our marriage is a happy one because we forgive. My wife and I are coming from two entirely different backgrounds, with different temperaments. She is rich, I am poor she is fair, I am dark; she is a doctor, I am an engineer; hers is socially a high family, ours a humble one. Our tastes and views differ a lot and the only way of coexistence is tolerance. We have learnt to accept each other as we are. My wife is a habitual things-dropper. She is capable of dropping anything and everything! When she was pregnant I joked that God should give us an iron baby, otherwise the baby would break! I am a chronic nail-biter! She can least stand the sight of her preacher husband biting his nails even on

the stage! Normally she won't fold her saree or remove the loose hair from the comb. She will forget to keep water on the dining table. These are things I cannot ignore. But over the years we have learnt to forgive and accept each other and live in harmony in spite of all our differences and weaknesses. Unity is not uniformity. Unity in diversity is God's plan for both the church and the family. Otherwise life will be dull suggest each couple read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 once every month together and check their life. Love forgives, it never fails. Husbands should refrain from passing on judgmental comments on their wives without an effort to understand their genuine problems. Don't shout at your wife if she is delayed by a few minutes to the church or a meeting. Do you wake up earlier than usual on Sunday mornings to help your wife do cooking quickly or getting the children dressed up and ready for the church? The wife is not your servant whom you can shout at. Treat her as a queen if you desire to be treated as a king. If you treat her just as a cook, you will not get anything more than the treatment of a head-cook! Also we should go one step beyond forgiving. To forgive is human; to forget is divine. So let's seek God's special grace not only to forgive our partners but also forget their wrongs. If there are defects in your partner, pray specifically and God would intervene. Praying for one another is the easiest way to develop an attitude of forgiving. Forgiveness increases love! (Lk 7:47). When a spirit of acceptance, joyful tolerance, endurance and forgiveness prevails at home, the children can learn forgiveness for their future family life. What a responsibility!

4. Fellowship

Husband and wife are called "heirs together of the grace of life" (1 Pet 3:7). That is why it is never right for a believer

to marry an unbeliever. An ox and a donkey should not be yoked together. If you are a child of God and you marry a child of the devil, you will have lot of problems with your father-in-law If the person proposed to you is not a believer, you don't need to "pray about" it at all. The Holy Spirit never contradicts the Holy Scriptures. If you marry in haste, you will worry at leisure. It is so wonderful to have a believing partner to address God together in prayer as "Our Father!" Apart from your individual time of devotions, spend time with your partner daily for prayer and meditation. Holding your partner's hand in the prayer closet in holy intercession is a rich experience. Jesus said when two are agreed together one earth nothing shall be impossible (Mt 18:19). Who can be the mighty two other than the husband and wife, who are united not only in spirit but also in flesh? When you return from a convention or a conference and your wife asks you, "How was the programme?" don't just give a juiceless answer, "It was good." Sit with her and tell her the details. She loves to listen to you narrating all that happened. Tell her how God dealt with you during prayer or preaching. Don't live in a closed shell. Be open and frank. It is written about the first couple before they sinned, "They were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed" (Gen 2:25). It is when we walk in the light-that is openness and transparency — we can have fellowship with one another (1 Jn 1:7). Partners should aim to grow together, Maturity thus attained makes the couples a great blessing to the church and the community. The present younger generation need practical models and workable solutions for their life's problems. A godly home cannot be substituted. Also it is when the husband and wife live in spiritual harmony and fellowship, they can triumphantly face the enemy. "Though one may be overpowered by

another, two can withstand him. And at three fold cord is not quickly broken” (Eccl 4:9-12). As the husband is the head of the wife and the family, his responsibility for the spiritual well-being of his wife and the children is greater. The husband in the Biblical sense is the priest at home. Study the biographies of godly couples from the Old and New Testaments. It is rewarding. Zacharias and Elizabeth were barren but they were a happy and one-minded couple, joyfully serving the Lord (Lk 1:5-7). Aquila and Priscilla are another example (Acts 18). The husband-wife team is very effective in the ministry. I thank God for a wife who stands with me in the joys and sorrows, victories and problems in the ministry. Visit homes and the sick together with your partner and witness how God mightily manifests His power. Don't despise your spouse if he or she is not as spiritual as you all. Give the partner all possible encouragement and appreciation. This helps growth.

Happy Marriage!

9

The Suffering Christian

No one other than Jesus has suffered mentally and physically like Job. But no one can escape the school of suffering. It is part of the plan. I have compiled here a list of confessions we should make, based on the words of Job approved by God, as we go through the furnace of suffering or fires of testing. The New Testament admonishes us to follow the “patience of Job” (Js 5:10,11). Patience is the sister of faith (Heb 6:12; Js 1:3) and a mark of perfection (Js 1:4).

1. I PRAISE THE LORD FOR EVERYTHING!

1:21, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord.”

Note in the very next verse the Holy Spirit endorses and approves his statement (v22).

Read 1 Thess 5:18; Phil 4:6.

2. I ACCEPT WHATEVER GOD ALLOWS IN MY LIFE!

2:10, “Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?”

Note again God endorses and approves this statement of Job in the same verse — “In all this Job did not sin with his lips!”

Read Rom 8:28,35.

3. I AM OPEN TO CORRECTION!

6:24,25, “Teach me, and I will hold my tongue; cause me to understand wherein I have erred. How forceful are right words! But what does your arguing prove?”

Read Psa 119:67,71; Heb 12:11.

4. I AM ABSOLUTELY UNWORTHY OF GOD’S RESPECT FOR ME!

7:17,18, “What is man, that You should magnify him, that You should set Your heart on him, that You should visit him every morning, and test him every moment?”

Read 1 Cor 15:9,10; Eph 3:8.

5. I TRUST GOD EVEN WHEN I CAN’T UNDERSTAND HIM!

9:10,11, “He does great things past finding out, yes, wonders without number. If He goes by me, I do not see Him; If He moves past, I do not perceive Him.”

Read Isa 50:10; compare Mt 27:46 with Lk 23:46.

6. I COUNT ON HIS MERCY AND GRACE ALONE!

9:15,16, “For though I were righteous, I could not answer Him; I would beg mercy of my Judge. If I called and He answered me, I would not believe that He was listening to my voice.”

Here Job says he would not trust even his prayer but the sheer mercy of God. What an example of God-centred faith!

Read Lam 3:22,23; 2 Cor 12:9.

7. I KNOW GOD HAS ALLOWED THIS SUFFERING IN MY LIFE

12:9,10, “Who among all these does not know that the hand of the

Lord has done this?”

Read Lk 12:7; Jn 18:11.

8. I SERVE A GOD WORTH SUFFERING FOR!

13:15, “Though He slay me, yet I will trust Him.”

Read Dan 3:17,18; Acts 5:41.

9. I LOOK FORWARD TO THE FUTURE GLORY!

19:25-27, “I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!”

Job says these words are worthy to be engraved on a rock with an iron pen and lead, forever! (v24). How true!

Read Rom 8:18.

10. I AM PURIFIED IN ALL SUFFERING!

23:10, "He knows the way that I take; When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold."

Read Heb 2:10,11; Rom 5:3,4.

11. I CANNOT BE CONDEMNED BECAUSE I AM IN CHRIST!

27:5,6, "Till I die I will not put away my integrity from me. My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go; my heart shall nor reproach me as long as I live."

This should not be understood as the self-righteousness of Job but his refusal to bow down to the anaemic philosophy of his friends that if you obey God you will be prosperous and suffering is only the result of sin!

Read Rom 8:1; Rev 12:10,11.

12. I WILL NOT QUESTION THE ALMIGHTY GOD!

42:2, "I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from you."

9:12, "Who Can Say to Him, "What are You doing?"

The name "Almighty" occurs in the entire Old Testament 48 times and 31 of those instances are in the Book of Job!

10

The Perfect Christian

PERFECTION is God's will for His people because He is perfect. But as Christians we must understand what is the New Testament concept of perfection. God's people are divided largely because of the failure to get a right perspective of this subject.

In one of the Church Services they served bread and wine after I preached. But one of the elders hesitated to pass on the plate to my wife because she was wearing jewels! For some others perfection means all white clothes! One pastor refused to visit one of his members who was sick because the sick man had taken some medicine! The list goes on and on like this. The devil has succeeded in getting us major on minors and emphasize the externals, but neglect "the weightier matters" (Mt 23:23). This is modern pharisaism.

Perfection is understood in the New Testament as **growth** and maturity. Look at Paul's explicit statement:

“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but ... I press on ... I do not count myself to have apprehended; but ... I press toward the goal ... Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind” (Phil 3:12-15). Perfection means building the superstructure and not laying the foundation again and again! Read Hebrews 6:1,2 carefully. According to this passage, repentance, baptism, gifts and all are kindergarten lessons. Should we not move on to high school and college levels? The apostles were deeply concerned about the perfection of the saints and they earnestly prayed and worked for the same (2 Cor 13:9,11; Col 4:12; 1 Thess 3:10).

As I went through the pages of the New Testament I came across the following MARKS OF PERFECTION.

1. Love for the unlovable

The word "perfect" occurs for the first time in the NT where the Lord is speaking about loving those who curse us, spitefully use us and persecute us (Mt 5:43-48). Jesus says that loving those who love us or greeting “our brethren only” has no merit and that’s what even the tax-collectors would do. These tax-collectors were noted for their imposition, rapine and extortion to which they were tempted to oppress the people with illegal taxes that they might more quickly enrich themselves. They loved those who gave them more! This is not the *agape* love. Our heavenly Father makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends the rain on the just and on the unjust! Roger Forster said, Love must love even when it gets nothing out of it. Loving and embracing only those of our own country, culture, community and Church is merely carnal. We must mature into spiritual love which will not

avoid but embrace even those who do not agree with us but contradict. Love is the queen of all the Christian graces (Col 3:12-14). Brotherly love must be the badge of Christ’s disciples (Jn 13:35). “Love is the bond of perfection.”

2. Detachment from materialism

A young man was boasting before Jesus that he had kept all the commandments from his youth and he asked what he still lacked. Jesus answered him, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me” (Mt 19:20,21). This truth is rarely preached these days. I know not why, People talk about Zion and New Jerusalem but they forget about throwing their possessions to feed the Lazaruses at their doorstep. The Bible clearly teaches that the love of money is the root of “all” evil but not many preach against sacrificing family and children just for the sake of more money. Apostle John did not mix up his words when he said, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 Jn 2:15). John Wesley said, To lay up treasure on earth is as plainly forbidden by our Master as adultery and murder. Saint Augustine was right when he said, We do not realize how much we are attached to the good things of this world until they are taken from us. Jesus said that cares, riches, and pleasures of life choke our life lest we bring fruit to “maturity” or perfection (Lk 8:14). Christian life is leaving and then cleaving (Phil 3: 13). In this context Paul tells with weeping about preachers “whose god is their belly — who set their mind on earthly things” (Phil 3:15-19). Please read Watchman Nee’s *Love Not The World*.

3. Control of the tongue

The epistle of James is one of the most practical books in the New Testament on holy and righteous living. And one of his main subjects is the tongue. He says, "If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body" (3:2). He emphasizes this truth, also saying, "If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue... this one's religion is useless" (1:26). While pointing to the perfect nature of Jesus, Peter says, "He committed no sin, nor was guile found in His mouth" (1 Pet 2:22). Jesus spoke truthful words (Mk 12:32), graceful words (Lk 4:22) and faultless words (Lk 20:26). Almost all the epistles emphasize the necessity of speaking the right words and avoiding unedifying talk. Of all members in the body, there is none so serviceable to Satan as the tongue, said Thomas Brooks. The jawbone of an ass was a killer in Samson's time. It still is! The Bible says, "No man can tame the tongue" (Js 3:8). It must be taken control of by the Holy Spirit. A confession of the sins of our tongue and a consecration of the tongue at the altar of God will bring down fire from above for cleansing and commission (Isa 6:5-9). Of all the members of their body the Holy Spirit primarily took hold of their tongue when He came upon the early disciples (Acts 2:4). We cannot ignore the importance!

4. Patience in suffering

Jesus the Author of our salvation was made "perfect through sufferings" (Heb 2:10). We learn more in times of adversity than in prosperity. "Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which he suffered. And having been perfected He became the author of eternal salvation" (Heb 5:8,9). Patience in suffering is a mark of

perfection. "Let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (Js 1:3,4). God used the "patience of Job" to bring him out as "gold" (Js 5:11; Job 23:10). While speaking about the sufferings inflicted on God's people all over the world by the roaring devil, Peter blessed the readers saying, "May the God of all grace ... after you suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you" (1 Pet 5:7-10). There is nothing like an unscarred saint! Matthew Henry that great Bible commentator said, Sanctified afflictions are spiritual promotions! Afflictions ripen our graces. Suffering in itself has no merit, but how we handle it speaks of our maturity. Fanny Crosby lost her sight forever because of a severe fever which struck her when she was only six weeks old. She lived up to ninety and gave the Christian world about 8000 hymns. Looking back she writes, "I verily believe that God has allowed me to live my days in physical darkness ... I could never have written the thousands of hymns if I had been hindered by the distractions that would have been presented to my notice." One of her hymns is "*Blessed Assurance*." This I call maturity.

5. Spiritual discernment

This means growing in the wisdom, knowledge, mind and will of God. Paul said, "We speak wisdom among those who are mature ... comparing spiritual things with spiritual ... things of God ... are spiritually discerned ... he who is spiritual judges all things" (1 Cor 2:6,13-15). The Word of God is the will of God in general and we understand the will of God in particular for our lives when we obey the Word of God. Epaphras prayed for the Colossian saints that they may "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God" (Col 4:12). The benediction at the end of the epistle to the Hebrews reads like this: "Now may the God of peace

... make you complete in every good work to do His will” (Heb 13:20,21). Neglect of systematic and painstaking study of God's Word is sure to lead us into spiritual disillusionment in these days of deluge

of false doctrines. Sincerity is no guarantee for soundness of doctrine. Many are sincerely wrong! “All Scripture is ... profitable ... that the man of God may be complete” (2 Tim 3:16,17). Devotion without discretion and discernments will end up in deception. God said, “My people have gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge” (Isa 5:13). Biblical illiteracy and spiritual retardation are the curses in the Church of today.

6. Unity among believers

“He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:11-13). We already have the “unity of the Spirit” which we must endeavour “to keep” (v3). But the “unity of the faith” is still not there and we are to work towards it (v13). Growth from the former to the latter is a mark of perfection. It is sad that each leader with a charisma tries to gather a group of people around him, secluding them from other Christians. This is completely contrary to the above teaching in Ephesians. All ministers must work towards integration and avoid any practice that would lead to segregation. Even missions should be careful here while enrolling partners or establishing prayer cells. The Church is one body; you cannot touch a toe without affecting the whole body! The New Testament knows nothing of free-lance

Christianity! Differences of opinions and doctrinal interpretations should not divide us. Unity is not uniformity. Diversity is not division. Variety is God's beauty. I am a charismatic but I have no problem in embracing and fellowshipping with a Plymouth Brethren or a Baptist! It was when Peter grew into maturity, he could embrace Paul with the words “our beloved brother Paul,” though some of what Paul had written were “hard to understand!” (2 Pet 3:15,16).

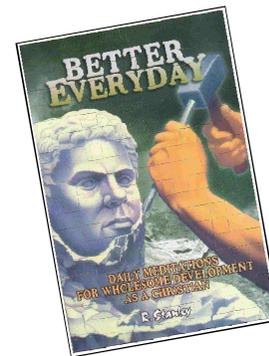
7. Christlikeness in character

“A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher” (Lk 6:40). The desire of the Father is that we must be “conformed to the image of His Son” (Rom 8:29). The Son said, “Follow Me” (Mt 4:19). And the Holy Spirit is transforming us “into the same imagine” of the Lord (2 Cor 3:18). This was the heartcry of the apostles — “to present every man perfect in Christ Jesus” (Col 1:28). Towards this end they not only taught, preached and warned every man but also presented themselves as patterns. Paul said, “Imitate me just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Cor 11:1; Phil 3:17). The task of every Christian in this world is to make the Lord Jesus visible, intelligible and desirable! Don't neglect the four Gospels but meditate on them regularly to watch how Jesus walked. Christ is not only a perfect model but also a sufficient model. Someone said Christ was not married and what lesson can we have from Him for family life! Read Ephesians 5:22-33 and you will understand! Let's subject ourselves to all changes necessary to reflect Christ in our character and conduct and when we do so, we can rejoice over the hope that “we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is!” (1 Jn 3:2,3).

In conclusion let me briefly explain the two aspects of perfection. One is the present perfection which is potential and the future one will be literal. Potentially all believers are already perfect. Look at these verses — “He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean” (Jn 13:10). You are complete in Him” (Col 2:10). “By one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified” (Heb 10:14). The literal perfection is still in the future, as the following passages teach. “When that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away” (1 Cor 13:10). “He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6). “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess 5:23).

Dear children of God, rejoice over these certainties: “The Lord will perfect that which concerns me” (Psa 138:8). “The path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day!” (Prov 4:18).

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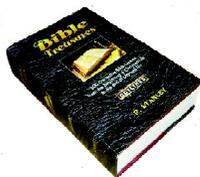
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