

P O W E R
BELONGS TO
G O D !

**POWER
BELONGS TO
GOD!**

R. STANLEY, B.E., M.TECH.,
*A BUILDING ENGINEER
TURNED BIBLE TEACHER*

Published by
BLESSING YOUTH MISSION
Church Colony, Vellore 632 006, India
Tel: 0416-2242943, 2248943
<bym@sancharnet.in>
www.blessingyouthmission.org

POWER BELONGS TO GOD!

Copyright 2003 R. STANLEY

First Edition : September 2003

Second Edition: March 2007

This Edition : July 2008

Available in Tamil also.

Printed by
Bapuji Printers
5 Kurban Ali Street
Woods Road
Chennai 600 002

Chapters

1. Power belongs to God!	...	7
2. Living by God's Power	...	12
3. Liberation through Christ	...	28
4. What the Spirit says	...	41
5. Power of Prayer	...	54
6. Gifts of Power	...	72
7. Signs and Wonders	...	86
8. How to overpower Satan	...	100
9. Power for Suffering	...	119
10. Power of Second Coming	...	139

Power belongs to God!

ONE of the earliest and enthralling self-revelations of God to man was, “I am God **Almighty!**” This came significantly to patriarchs “Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” (Gen 17:1; Ex 6:3). The Hebrew word so translated is *EL SHADDAI*. It occurs 218 times in the Holy Bible. To David the Psalmist this was an ever-echoing theme. He wrote, “God has spoken once; twice I have heard this: **Power belongs to God**” (Psa 62:11).

The Bible is a record of the manifestation of God’s power in each era of human history. It is not an exaggeration if we say that the Bible is the story of God’s power. In Genesis we witness the creative power of God; in Exodus His power of deliverance; in Leviticus His power of cleansing; in Numbers His power on His people

in their wanderings; in Deuteronomy the power of His Word; and so on. In the Book of Joshua is seen God’s power over His enemies. The other books of the Old Testament testify of God’s power which was operative through Judges, Kings and Prophets. God’s power is seen in His miraculous provision to His people, in their restoration from backsliding, and in preserving them in trials and suffering. Daniel and Elijah were signs of God’s power to challenge heathenic and ungodly rulers.

As we come to the New Testament, which is the dawn of redemption, we see the power of God operating in an unprecedented manner. In the four Gospels we see the power of the Kingdom of God revealed in the ministry, the death and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Every one of the twentyeight chapters of the Acts of the Apostles is packed with the power of the Holy Spirit. The Epistles are the tangible expression of the power of God through the worship and fellowship of saints in the Church. The full and final manifestation of God’s power is revealed and anticipated in the Book of Revelation. Here’s a song sung in Heaven: “Alleluiah! For the Lord God **Omnipotent** reigns!” (Rev 19:6).

David who wrote “Power belongs to God” also added in the very next verse, “Also to You, Lord, belongs mercy!” (Psa 62:11,12). God’s power is not to boost up His ego or promote His enjoyment. His power is mainly for the good of His creation and children. His “power” flows into our lives through His “mercy!” “He gives power to the weak!” (Isa 40:29a). In other words, the manifestation of God’s power in our lives is in proportion to our realisation of our weakness and inadequacy. This book is written for those who are hungry for God’s power. The eyes of the Lord are running to and fro throughout the earth to locate hungry folks in and through whom He can exhibit His power (2 Chr 16:9).

Christianity has two main streams—one which emphasizes the Word of God and the other the Power of God. Denominationally speaking, the former is non-Pentecostal and the other is Pentecostal. These two aspects are perfectly blended and balanced all through the Scriptures. But somehow we have become partial and eccentric. Unless the Word of God and the Power of God are brought together, our wilderness journey will be still longer and Canaan too far. Jesus in His day itself rebuked this dichotomy: “You are mistaken, because you don’t know the

Scriptures, *and* you don’t know the power of God” (Mt 22:29). Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals must embrace each other, and then and only then notable and irrefutable things would happen to silence the enemies and advance the Kingdom of God.

For over 20 years from 1971 the Blessing Youth Mission used to hold annual revival camps, separately for men and women, to study the Word of God and to be charged with the power of God. There would be a specific Biblical theme for each of these three day gatherings of 1000 to 2000 delegates. I had the privilege of delivering the key lectures on these subjects. The theme for the camp in 1975 was “*Power*,” and that for the year 2002 was “*Power plus Power!*” A good portion of what you read in this book is from the meditations of these camps.

The next chapter is a study of how we have the power of God available to us from our initial salvation to Christ’s Second Coming. Chapter three explains the benefits we receive from the power of God that was revealed in the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ. The fourth chapter is a comprehensive study of the helps of the Holy Spirit whom Christ sent as the Second Helper. The

power of prayer is illustrated in chapter five. Chapter six is a practical teaching on how to identify and use spiritual gifts. Chapter seven challenges that the days of miracles are not past. Practical guidelines to overpower Satan are in chapter eight. God's power to sustain us in suffering is explained in chapter nine. The last chapter speaks of God's power to be revealed in the Second Coming of Christ. Reading of the entire book at one stretch is to be followed up by detailed study of each chapter, individually or in groups. Your life and work will never be the same again.

We are oftentimes intimidated by the powers of the technological world and the unseen world of evil. This book reaffirms that power belongs to God, and the One who indwells us is greater than the one in the world! This book puts back in the mouths of the readers these eternal words: "Yours is the Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory, for ever and ever!"

2

Living by God's Power

ABSENCE of power in the lives of those who worship the Omnipotent God is self-contradicting. But that is what is predicted as a sign of the endtime religion. These apostates will have a mere outward semblance of piety but deny its power (2 Tim 3:5). We are called to renounce such powerless Christianity.

In the world of sports they talk about "Power Shoes." Readymade garments are advertised as "Power Dressing." Automobile companies promote "Power Steering." How will God tolerate His people living as powerless paupers? More than our desire to experience God's power is His delight to manifest His power in and

through us. “The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself mighty on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him” (2 Chr 16:9). Life lived out with natural wisdom and mere physical strength will end meaninglessly. But life in the supernatural power of God is a glorious fulfillment. Jesus “lives by the power of God” so we also may live by the same power (2 Cor 13:4).

Here’s a study of how we have the power of God available to us for every sphere of life from our initial Salvation to Christ’s Second Coming. With proper appropriation of this divine supply our Christian life will be one of demonstration of God’s power from beginning to end.

1. Power of the Gospel

The power of the Gospel is what initiates our Christian life. Apostle Paul unashamedly declared to those in Rome, the political capital of the then world, “The Gospel is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes” (Rom 1:16). It applies equally to all, whether a religious Jew or an intellectual Greek or an illiterate tribal (v14). No religious ritual however sacred, no logical reasoning however sound, or no tradition however ancient can save a man. The Gospel of

Jesus Christ is the only power that God uses to bring men and women into eternal salvation.

The story of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is not merely a historical event. It’s a message of power. It transforms “*the vilest offender the moment he truly believes!*” The Gospel is not just a narrative. It’s a Person. It’s Christ. “Christ is the power of God” for salvation (1 Cor 1:24). The Message of the Cross is the power of God that saves us (1 Cor 1:18).

Apostle Peter calls the Gospel an imperishable seed. It is packed with life and power. This is the seed responsible for our rebirth (1 Pet 1:23). Jesus was conceived in the womb of Mary when the power of the Highest overshadowed her (Lk 1:35). The virgin birth of Christ was a human impossibility. “But with God nothing will be impossible,” said Angel Gabriel to her (Lk 1:37). No sinner is too sinful to be saved. Referring to an extremely difficult situation, the disciples of Christ asked Him, “Who then can be saved?” His answer was just the same as that of Gabriel to Mary (Mt 19:25,26).

Salvation is a deliverance. It is getting snatched away from the clutches of

Satan. The Gospel message is the emancipation proclamation. It leads the victim from prison to palace. It lifts the sinner from the guttermost to the uppermost and seats him with Christ in the heavenlies. It was this understanding that excited Zacharias to celebrate redemption as raising up of a “horn of salvation!” (Lk 1:68,69).

2. Power of Christ's Blood

Rarely does a Gospel meeting close without singing of the chorus—

*There is power, power,
Wonder-working power
In the Blood of the Lamb...
In the precious Blood of the Lamb!*

The power of the Blood of Christ cannot be overestimated. It does not just wash away “our sins,” but cleanses “us.” Not just some “sins” but all “sin!” (1 Jn 1:7). It leaves no stain whatsoever. Its detergent effect is so thorough that it makes us stand before God as if we had never sinned! God calls us promising, “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isa 1:18,19). The Blood of Christ gives us holy boldness to enter the Holiest! (Heb 10:19). No hesitation at all!

The immediate and inevitable effect of sin is guilt. That’s what made our first parents hide from the presence of God. Men down through the ages have been trying various means, religious and other, to get rid of guilt, but in vain. Psychology gives temporary relief but not a permanent release. Praise God for the power of His Son’s Blood! It purges our conscience from “dead” works to serve the “living” God (Heb 9:14). This is what the Devil hates most. With all his wisdom of experience he will endeavour to bring us back into the bondage and burden of guilt. The tool he primarily employs is accusation. That’s why his very name is “Accuser” of God’s people (Rev 12:10). He is on this mission “day and night.” The only thing he fears is the Blood of Jesus. His accusation stops when we answer him with the Blood of Jesus (v 11).

There is no saint who never sins. There is no day when we don’t sin. The cleansing stream of Immanuel’s Blood keeps flowing over us all the time. Like pebbles under a water course, we are constantly under the cleansing stream of the Blood of Jesus. The hymnologist has beautifully captured this thought—

*Come for a cleansing to Calvary's tide ...
Sin-stains are lost in its life-giving flow...*

It is easy to stay holy under favourable circumstances. But when everything works against us and we are tossed by trials and tribulations, it is near impossible to keep our thoughts free from unbelief, our words free from complaints, and our deeds free from our own ways. The power of the Blood of Christ is manifestly operative in such hard times. Apostle John in his Heavenly visions saw a great multitude which no one could number from all nations worshipping God with palm branches in their hands. He was interested to know who they were. One of the elders answered, "These are the ones who have come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb" (Rev 7:14).

3. Power of God's Word

The entire universe was created by the spoken Word of God (Heb 11:3). When God said, "Let there be light," there was light. When God said, "Let there be trees," so it was. God's Word is still the same. Its power has not changed. "The Word of the Lord endures forever" even if all creation vanishes away (1 Pet 1:24,25).

The power of God's Word is illustrated in various ways in the Scriptures. God Himself challenges His people, "Is not My Word

like a fire, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?" (Jer 23:29). Prophet Jeremiah testified, "His Word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones" (Jer 20:9). The fire of God's word burns up the rubbish in our life and refines us as pure gold. What the best of human argument cannot do, the Word of God can accomplish in us if only we would allow it to work freely in us.

David sang, "The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty. The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars... the voice of the Lord divides the flames of fire. The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness" (Psa 29:3-8). No problem in our life is too difficult to be solved by the Word of God. In the Bible is the answer to our every question which needs to be answered on this side of eternity.

Bodily sickness is common to all. Praise God for all the medical help available today, but we are well aware of its limitations. The miracle healing power of God can be experienced by those who believe it. With reference to the wilderness journey of the Israelites we read, "God sent His *Word* and healed them" (Psa 107:20). Jesus praised the military official's faith as "great" when the latter pleaded with Him, "Just speak a *word*, and my servant will

be healed!” (Mt 8:8-10). Observing the healing ministry of Jesus, Matthew reported, “He cast out the demons with a *word*, and healed all who were sick” (Mt 8:16). Those who are regular in Bible meditation will experience both spiritual and physical health (Prov 4:20-22).

The stunted growth of many a Christian is primarily due to insufficient intake of the Word of God. Just like babies we are to be craving for the milk of God’s Word. Growth is not possible otherwise (1 Pet 2:2). The Word of God to us is what “water is to the earth,” and what “seed is to the sower,” and what “bread is to the eater” (Isa 55:10). It refreshes us, replenishes us, and rejuvenates us. If we thus meditate the Bible with hunger and thirst, its God-intended purpose shall be fully accomplished in us. God says, “My Word shall not return to Me without fruit” (v 11).

In this age of hectic activity, whether spiritual or secular, we must guard ourselves of the danger of becoming too busy to spend unhurried time in Bible meditation. We may build massive structures or launch mammoth projects. They will impress God the least. But He is attracted towards the one who “trembles at His Word” (Isa 66:1,2). Which means, God

honours those who honour His Word. He prospers the work of their hands (Psa 1:2,3). Our mental strength and physical stamina cannot sustain us too long without the spiritual power that comes from God’s Word. This is why David prayed frequently, “Strengthen me according to Your Word” (Psa 119:28).

4. Power of God’s Presence

The omnipotent God is also omnipresent (Psa 139:7-9). He “is” everywhere. But He “dwells” among His people. Jesus promised, “Where two or three are gathered together in My Name, I am there in the midst of them” (Mt 18:20). The very name of the city of God’s people is Jehovah-Shamma, which means, “The Lord is there!” (Ezek 48:35). In Psalms we read, “God is in her palaces” (Psa 46:5; 48:3).

As we move to the New Testament, the Church of Christ is the City of God. It is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ as the chief cornerstone. The believers are the “living stones” with which the superstructure is built. It’s a spiritual house. It’s the temple of the Holy Spirit (Eph 2:20-22; 1 Pet 2:4,5). Eventhough God has promised that His presence would be with every individual child of His, He reveals His glory

in a greater measure when His children come together. We understand His love better when we study it with other saints (Eph 3:18). No organ can enjoy the blessing of the Head if it is severed from the body (Eph 4:15,16). Here lies the absolute necessity of fellowshiping with fellow-believers. Over-independent believers will die of the disease of deception (Heb 3:12,13).

God chose to appear to His people several times in fire in order to teach them how powerful His presence is. The Angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in a “flame of fire” (Ex 3:2). Stephen specifically mentioned it in his martyrdom address (Acts 7:30). On the day when the Lord delivered David from all his enemies, he sang, “Smoke went up from His nostrils, and devouring fire from His mouth” (2 Sam 22:1,8). In Ezekiel’s vision, the appearance of the Lord was “fire all around” (Ezek 1:27). Daniel saw “a river of fire” flowing from God’s presence (Dan 7:10a). At the inauguration of the Church on the Day of Pentecost, one of the manifest signs of the Holy Spirit was “tongues of fire” (Acts 2:3). Our God is a consuming fire (Dt 4:24; Heb 12:29). If we forget this oft-repeated truth, we will lose our reverence for God in walk and worship.

The other side of the presence of God is joy. “In Your presence is fullness of joy”

(Psa 16:11). “You have made the king exceedingly glad with Your presence” (Psa 21:6). “You will make me full of joy in Your presence” (Acts 2:28). This is the joy of worship. God inhabits the praises of His people (Psa 22:3). David got excited everytime he got an opportunity to go to the temple (Psa 122:1).

We experience the power of God’s presence to the maximum when we combine both reverence and joy. Irreverential rejoicing is mere sensationalism. Joyless reverence is slavery. “Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling” (Psa 2:11).

5. Power of God’s Spirit

Under the Old Covenant, the prophets, priests and kings alone were anointed with oil. Besides this, the Spirit of God came upon certain select individuals for special tasks. But in the New Covenant, that is, in the last days, the Holy Spirit is poured out on “all flesh”— all the children of God—young or old, servants or masters (Acts 2:17,18). All believers are priests. All Christians are clergy. There is no laity! (1 Pet 2:5,9).

The power of the Holy Spirit is given to us for many reasons. The supreme purpose is to make us bold in the proc-

lamation of the Gospel (Acts 1:8). Paul reminded the Christians in Thessalonica, “Our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit” (1 Thess 1:5).

In this age of reasoning we are tempted to think that logical presentation of the gospel will be far more effective than the powerful proclamation of it. We are mistaken. Let’s remember that we are dealing with souls, not with brains. Quoting Paul again, from what he wrote to the Corinthians, “My speech and preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of man but in the power of God” (1 Cor 2:4,5). That which is born in the head will reach only heads; what is born in the heart will reach hearts.

The power of God’s Spirit becomes tangible through His gifts. One of the representative lists of the gifts of the Spirit is in 1 Corinthians 12:7-10. This list has nine of them. The word of wisdom, the word of knowledge and discernment of spirits are the gifts of *revelation*; prophecy, tongues and interpretation are the gifts of *communication*; faith, healing and miracles are those of *demon-*

stration. Gospel preaching to be most effective must have these three. With a personal *revelation* of God’s grace to us, we must *communicate* the gospel of Christ with the *demonstration* of the Spirit’s power. Apostle Paul’s missionary coverage of regions from Jerusalem to Rome was on this pattern (Rom 15:18,19).

Though we don’t need to tarry today for the Holy Spirit to come from Heaven, we must wait on God to be filled and fired with His power to go forth and “turn the world upside down”— no, no, to set right the world that’s upside down! (Acts 17:6). The task of world evangelisation is Himalayan. But it can be done and it will be done by the power of God’s Spirit (Zech 4:6,7).

6. Power of God’s Hand

God’s hand, particularly His right hand, speaks of His power to overthrow the enemies, to deliver His people and to protect them. Moses sang, “Your right hand, O Lord, has become glorious in power; Your right hand, O Lord, has dashed the enemy in pieces” (Ex 15:6).

Standing before the Jewish tribunal, Jesus said, “Hereafter the Son of Man will sit on the right hand of the power of God” (Lk 22:69).

After resurrection when He was received up into Heaven, He sat down at the right hand of God (Mk 16:19). The Father has told the Son, "Sit at My right hand till I make Your enemies Your footstool" (Mk 12:36). The most exciting truth is that we are also seated with Christ up there! (Eph 1:3). The same power which raised Him from the dead and seated Him in Heaven is working in us mightily (Eph 1:19,20). The victory of Christ is our victory. He is the Head and we are His Body. Both are inseparably one. The Body cannot function without the Head. The Head will not function without the Body (vv 22,23).

God has not promised us a problem-free life. Jesus unequivocally said, "In the world you *will* have tribulation." He didn't stop there. He also said, "But be of good cheer; I have overcome the world!" (Jn 16:33). Whatever may be the height or the weight of the problem, here's God's unfailing promise: "Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you; I will uphold you with My righteous right hand" (Isa 41:10).

There is only one thing that can hinder the working of God's hand on our behalf. That is sin. Prophet Isaiah shouted, "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save... But your iniquities

have separated you from your God" (Isa 59:1,2). The solution is in confessing and forsaking of all that displeases God in our life. Then with confidence we can pray, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord! Awake as in the ancient days, as in the generations of old!" (Isa 51:9).

7. Power of God's Angels

We often recite 1 John 4:4, "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." But seldom do we realize that "angels are (also) greater in power and might" than demonic powers (2 Pet 2:11).

Many Christians consider the study of angels optional. See how angels are associated with us. When we are born again, we are said to have come not only into the general assembly of saints but also into "an innumerable company of angels" (Heb 12:22,23). Angels are jubilantly excited even over one sinner who repents! (Lk 15:7,10). They eagerly watch every gospel programme (1 Pet 1:12c). They join us in the worship of the Almighty (1 Cor 11:5,10). They are concerned about discipline in the Church (1 Tim 5:21). They are spirits sent to serve us every way (Heb 1:7,14).

The ministry of angels will assume new proportions and dimensions towards

Christ's second coming and the end of the age. In the Book of Revelation references to angelic activities abound (Rev 7:1,2; 8:2,6; 10:1; 12:7; 14:6,8,9; 15:6; 18:1; etc.) Christ will return to earth with His mighty angels (Mt 16:27; 2 Thess 1:7). The voice of an archangel will herald His descent from Heaven (1 Thess 4:16). The angels will be the reapers of the final harvest. They will gather out of God's Kingdom all the offenders and the lawless, and bring together the elect from all over the world (Mt 13:39,41; 24:31). Jesus will openly acknowledge in the presence of angels those who had acknowledged Him publicly before men, and deny those who had denied Him (Lk 12:8,9).

Most of what the angels of God do to us is unseen and unknown. The angels never show off. They are known for covering their faces and feet when they fly about their services! (cf. Isa 6:2). They don't draw our attention towards themselves. I wish God would tell me, when I shall meet with Him face to face, all that the angels have done to me from mummy's womb to my tomb! Thank you, angels dear!

3

Liberation through Christ

IN His incarnation Jesus descended from Heaven to earth; in His crucifixion He further descended from earth to Hades; in His resurrection He ascended from Hades to the earth; and in His ascension He ascended back to Heaven. The greatest benefit of the descent and ascent of Christ is the liberation of captive souls. "He led captivity captive" (Eph 4:8). "Glorious liberty!" (Rom 8:21).

Let's study here seven gleaming facets of this liberty we can enjoy through Christ's death, resurrection and ascension.

1. Liberation from Carnalism

"Since Christ suffered for us in the flesh," we need "no longer live in the flesh for the lusts of men" (1 Pet 4:1,2).

No more “licentiousness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties and abominable idolatries” (v 3). No longer slavery to sin! (Rom 6:6).

This is what baptism is all about. Immersion in water is a symbol of our death and burial with Christ. The old man of carnality is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away (Rom 6:6). As we come out of water, we put on the new man “created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness” (Rom 6:3-5; Eph 4:24). Noah was saved through water from a world sold to carnality and corruption. Baptism which is the antitype is meant to minister the same blessing to us (1 Pet 3:18-22).

We are no more debtors to the flesh (Rom 8:10-12). We are released from the slavery of sin, because Christ is risen (1 Cor 15:17). Whereas the death of Christ frees us from the *penalty* of sin, His resurrection frees us from its *power* (1 Cor 15:3,17). Faith in the resurrection of Christ grants us an instant supply of power to say no to sin. The “Spirit of Holiness” which resurrected Jesus works mightily in us also. The “exceedingly great promises” and the “exceeding greatness of His power” become ours. We are thus enabled to escape devilish lust and enjoy divine life (Rom 1:4; 2 Pet 1:3,4; Eph 1:19,20).

When Christ left Heaven, in His farewell address He said to the Father, “Sacrifice and offering You do not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me... Behold I have come—to do Your will, O God!” (Heb 10:5,6). So also we are to present our bodies a living sacrifice to Him. By this act is meant that we accept transformation to God’s will and refuse conformation to Satan’s world (Rom 12:1,2).

2. Liberation from Materialism

His encounter with the Risen Christ on the Damascus road blinded Paul to earthly gains so he could behold eternal glories. He pledged, “God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal 6:14). His tears were uncontrollable when this liberated man thought about preachers in the clutches of materialism: “They are the enemies of the cross of Christ—who set their mind on earthly things” (Phil 3:18,19).

“A satisfied soul tramples on the honeycomb!” (Prov 27:7). When spiritual blessings satisfy us, material benefits fail in their attempts to allure us (Col 3:1-3). We turn down the booty offered by the King of Sodom because we are taken up with the “bread and wine” of the King of Salem

(Gen 14:18-23). To the surprise of the worldlings we refuse to bow before the goddess of wealth (Col 3:5).

But unfortunately a new breed of Christians and preachers has come which considers the material and earthly benefits as “the” blessing from God. This health-and-wealth gospel is the most popular stuff served by pulpits and press. The customers are obviously the Biblical illiterates. No one has properly taught them why Christ descended and ascended. There is a striking example to this situation in the gospels—

Many disciples of Christ left Him when He contrasted the heavenly bread with earthly manna. They called it a “hard saying!” Jesus confronted them, “Does this offend you? What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before?” (Jn 6:58-66). Jesus did not become nervous when His entourage fell sharply. He asked the twelve, “Do you also want to go away?” He rejoiced when Peter replied that it was the words of “eternal” life that held them stuck to Him. In this context, Jesus called Judas a devil because he was money-minded (vv 67-71).

Beware of the Sadducees in the Church today! They live for this world alone. They

laugh at the thought of the other world (Acts 23:8). But God’s word warns us, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead!” (1 Cor 15:19,20). Those who stress the earthly blessings over the eternal are no better than beasts! (v 32).

3. Liberation from Ritualism

The death of Christ rang the death bell to ritualistic religion. When He gave up His spirit, “the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom” (Mt 27:51). There was no more to be an exclusive place called the Holy of Holies. It became a thoroughfare. Also there were no more to be two categories among God’s people, namely clergy and laity. *Wherever* God’s people would meet in the Name of Jesus, the very presence of God was assured. *Whoever* became a child of God was instantly declared a priest before God. “All” the people of God have become a royal priesthood (1 Pet 2:5,9).

How sad that we still have so-called altars in our worship places! How unscriptural it is under the New Covenant! Sheer idolatry! What God Himself has torn— “from top to bottom”—why should man stitch together? Reality has come. Let

go rituals. Setting up altars, attaching sanctity to certain places, burning candles and incense, bowing before crosses and crucifixes, ministers wearing special dresses, etc., are nothing but “dead works” (Heb 9:1-14). “Arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light” (Eph 5:14).

The Throne of Grace is open anytime to anyone who trusts in the shed blood of Christ (Heb 4:14-16). We can enter the very presence of God instantaneously in simple faith without any human mediator, because Jesus the Forerunner has entered there “for us” (Heb 6:19,20). Because He has become “higher than the heavens,” He is able to save us from the guttermost to the uttermost! (Heb 7:25-27).

Commandments given to the Old Covenant people regarding food, drink, festivals or sabbaths were merely shadows. “But the substance is Christ” (Col 2:11-17).

Adding ritualistic flavour or attaching ceremonial importance to the Lord’s Supper is also idolatry. It is just simple bread and wine to remember the death of the Lord until He returns. Believers can come together anywhere anytime to celebrate the Lord’s victory through these emblems of His body and blood. No “special” order of service is necessary,

or “fulltime” minister a must. Is it not a bread which “we” break, and a cup which “we” bless? (1 Cor 10:16,17; Acts 2:46).

Sure, such a teaching will invite the fury of some “clergy,” but it will invoke the favour of Christ!

4. Liberation from Legalism

“Christ is the end of the law” (Rom 10:4). While contrasting the righteousness which is of the law and the righteousness of faith, Paul wrote, “But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way: Do not say in your heart, Who will ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above) or, Who will descend into the abyss? (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)” (vv 6,7).

“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us” (Gal 3:13). He has “wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross” (Col 2:14). Christ was crucified, but He came back alive. The Law was crucified and was cast away, never to be resurrected. The New Covenant was not added to the Old, but the New annulled the Old!

Before his conversion Paul was a legalist. But he dumped his long-cherished legalism as dung that he might know Christ and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings (Phil 3:4-10). Next to the Epistle of Romans, every Christian must study the Epistle of Galatians thoroughly. Otherwise having been justified by faith we will be easily jolted by false teachers who would enter secretly to steal away our liberty in Christ (Gal 2:4).

Some choose to gather for worship on Saturdays, others on Sundays, and still others on anyday. Let each one decide for himself according to his conviction and convenience. Some freely eat pork and crab, others only mutton, beef and fish, while still others only vegetarian food. Let each one decide his menu for himself. "For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again... But why do you judge your brother?" (Rom 14:1-10).

Even spiritual disciplines like tithing and fasting cannot be made legal commandments for Christians. How much to give and how often to fast are left to the discretion of individuals, though under the Better Covenant we should excel the Old Testament folks. It was to the question why His disciples did not fast like the disciples of John and the Pharisees,

Jesus answered, "No one puts new wine into old wineskins!" (Mk 2:18-22).

5. Liberation from Defeatism

The defeatist mentality of Peter and the other disciples disappeared the moment the ascension gift of Christ, even the Holy Spirit, descended on them. Addressing the confused Jewish community on the Day of Pentecost, Peter authoritatively declared, "This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear!" (Acts 2:32,33).

If Jesus had not ascended, the Holy Spirit would not have descended. The disciples got into feelings of fear when Jesus began telling them that He would leave them soon. But He assured them, "It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you" (Jn 16:7).

The greatest blessing therefore of the ascent of Christ is the descent of the Spirit with His gifts and power. "When He ascended on High, He... gave gifts to men... some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints"

(Eph 4:8-12). Not only corporately but also individually every Christian is gifted (Rom 12:4-6; 1 Cor 12:7). The Church is thus fully equipped to assault the enemy and accomplish its call and commission on earth.

When Christ came out triumphantly from the grave, He gave the disciples marching orders: "All authority is given to Me. Go therefore!" When He ascended, the disciples advanced. He caused them to triumph everywhere (Mk 16:19,20; 2 Cor 2:14). They went plundering hell and planting churches in colonies and countries. The gates of Hades could not stop their aggression. They kept challenging, "O Hades, where is your victory?" (Mt 16:18; 1 Cor 15:55,57).

But the Church of today is bowed before the world because Christians have not had their eyes enlightened yet to know God's power which was demonstrated at the resurrection and ascension of Christ (Eph 1:17-21).

*Onward Christian soldiers!
Marching as to war,
With the cross of Jesus
Going on before.
Christ the royal Master,
Leads against the foe;
Forward in the battle,
See His banners go !*

6. Liberation from Factionalism

"There is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free," because Christ has become "all and in all" by virtue of His descent and ascent (Col 3:11). Because He is supreme and sovereign in His Church, there is no place for national, racial or social distinction. All are equal before the majesty and splendour of the ascended Lord. Boasting or despising is ruled out.

If there were two groups who perhaps could never come together, they were Jews and Gentiles. The Jews would despise the Gentiles to the extent of calling them dogs. Even with Samaritans, who were half-Jews, the Jews would not have any dealing—including asking a drink! (Jn 4:9). The Jews would rather travel a few extra miles than passing through a Samaritan village! But Christ broke down "the middle wall of partition" (Eph 2:14). He put to death the "enmity" between the two groups (v 16).

Christian groups which are factionalised by caste, class, colour or any such thing are not founded properly on Christ (Eph 2:19-22). The apostle hammered the Corinthian contenders with the root question: "Was Paul crucified for you? (1 Cor 1:10-13).

We the Indian Christians are yet to realize that the major cause of our weakness and witnesslessness before the non-Christian majority is our individualism and denominationalism. May we rise above the interests of our little kingdoms to serve the King of kings and the Lord of lords!

7. Liberation from Pessimism

Pessimism is another word for unbelief. The immediate outcome of a pessimistic attitude is fear. Following crucifixion the disciples locked themselves in out of fear. But the Risen Lord entered the room greeting them, "Peace!" To blow away their fear He breathed on them the Spirit. And He urged them not to stay shut in but go out! (Jn 20:19-22).

Christ's message to the churches of today is just the same: "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore. And I have the keys of Hades and Death" (Rev 1:17-19).

Forty days after resurrection when Jesus ascended in a cloud, pessimism and uncertainty once again gripped those men of Galilee. God therefore sent two men in white uniform—not in black which

would symbolize death—to tell the disciples something like this: "Why do you stand gazing as if all is lost? As He went up, so He would come back. You get on with the job He has given you!" (Acts 1:9-11).

The power of God through Christ has thus liberated us from everything that is contrary to our wellbeing and God's will. All "isms" have become "wasms!" Friend, "plant your feet firmly in the freedom that Christ has won for us, and do not let yourselves be caught again in the shackles of slavery!" (Gal 5:1).

4

What the Spirit says

MY Predecessor introduced Me to His disciples as “Another Helper” (Jn 14:16). They were worrying what they would do when He would be taken away from them. He was not only their Master but also their Friend. For everything they approached Him, for help and consultation. He told them not to be troubled in their hearts because He would send Me in His place. His last sermon was about Me. I prompted His bosom disciple John to record it in his Gospel (Ch 14 & 16).

The very mention of My Name was allergic to people for a long time. They thought I belonged to the Pentecostal Church because I came down from Heaven on the Day of Pentecost. But over the years they have found out from the study of the Scriptures that I am a Gift from the Father

to any of His children who would want Me (Lk 11:13; Acts 2:39).

Eventhough many Christians have now received Me, they stop with their initial encounter with Me. What John the Baptist referred to as the “baptism with the Holy Spirit” is only an introduction to a life with Me. I want you to walk with Me moment by moment (Gal 5:25). My Greek name is *Parakletos*, which means an ever-present Helper alongside. Would you, My child, give me a patient ear as I want to tell you how I can help you? It’s all for your good, dear!

r The Heavenly Father is a worship-lover. Eventhough angels have been worshipping Him non-stop from eternity past, He is not satisfied. He longs for worship from men and women. He looks for worshippers everywhere (Jn 4:23). Your worship actually does not add anything to His Being, but He delights in it because that’s where intimate fellowship begins (Acts 17:25).

God through Moses had given to His people many laws on worship. It all became a mere ritual without spirit. But God is a Spirit, not a substance. Worship therefore must be spiritual (Jn 4:20-24; Acts 17:22-25). I am sent to enliven your

worship. When you open up yourself to Me I will release your inner man so your soul will be raptured into joyful praise (Phil 3:3).

To what extent you empty yourself and seek Me, to that extent I will fill you. I will make your heart rejoice and tongue glad. I will cause psalms and hymns and spiritual songs flow out of your heart. You will make melodies and your spirit will soar high in exultation (Eph 5:18-20). Not even David or Deborah had experienced this dimension. This was reserved for you who is drenched in My endtime showers!

Because language is the chief means of worship I specifically touch your tongue. If you desire I will gift you with the ability to speak in languages which you have neither learnt nor can understand (Acts 2:4; 10:46). Through this gift you can bypass your mind and bless God in your spirit. I will grant deep restfulness to your inner man and you will be thoroughly refreshed.

My child, I also understand your difficulties in prayer. Many times, especially when you go through difficult and confusing situations, you do not know how and what to pray. You are unable to

find God's mind. Don't worry, I am there for you. I will not only guide you in prayer but also pray for you. I will groan for you when your language cannot adequately express your sorrow. Depend on Me. I will help in your weakness (Rom 8:26,27).

r I know you love the Bible, but many times you find it difficult to understand. Don't lose heart, my child, I've come to explain to you its meaning. Do you know it was I who authored the Scriptures? Moses wrote, David wrote, Isaiah wrote, Daniel wrote, Luke wrote, Paul wrote, and there were about 40 such writers. But I only inspired and instructed them. I also superintended them while they were writing. Not a single word was penned without My authorisation (2 Pet 1:20,21). As such who can explain the contents to you better than I? That's why the Son of God called Me as the Spirit of Truth. I am committed to lead you into all truth (Jn 16:13).

Your natural mind cannot understand the deep things of God. I will enlighten your mind so you will understand His mysteries. Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. But He reveals them to you through Me. Just as your spirit

alone knows what is in you, I only know the things of God, because I am His Spirit. I do not want you miss any of what God has promised you in His Word. My true ministers will not attempt to explain to you those blessings through their brilliance. Rather, they will speak to you under My anointing (1 Cor 2:9-13). When you learn to recognize My voice and whisper, no one can easily deceive you with false teaching (1 Jn 2:26,27). I will grow you in the art of discernment (1 Cor 2:15; Heb 5:14).

Don't ever neglect to meditate the Bible. That is the only guiding star in this world of darkness (2 Pet 1:19). Don't be deceived by strange voices. I also will not speak on My own authority. I will only take from what the Father and the Son have spoken (Jn 16:13; 15:26). Unless you saturate your heart and mind with the written Word, what can I remind you of at crucial situations? (Jn 14:26).

I am gentle as a dove. I won't force Myself on anyone. Unless you invite Me to help you, I will not assist you in your study of the Scriptures (Psa 119:18). If you give Me a free hand, I will transform you stage by stage so you as a child of God will become like the very Son of God whom you meet in the Holy Writ (2 Cor 3:18).

r Dear child, I would also like to help you in your battles of life. Ever since we pushed Lucifer out of Heaven, he is outrageously working against us and the entire creation. His main target is those who are redeemed by the blood of Jesus. His kingdom of darkness is in constant collision with Our Kingdom of light. Ultimate victory is Ours, but the fight will be tough.

You are engaged in a warfare that is both within you and without. I assure you of My help whether it is inner conflict or external battle.

The inner conflict is between your body and your mind. You are not able to do what you desire, but you keep doing what you hate. I hear your cry, "Who shall deliver me from this wretched condition?" Fear not, I will take care of you. I am the Spirit of Life. I will give you new strength. I will empower you to overcome your sinful desires (Rom 7:22-24). Keep walking with Me. Obey My promptings whether you like them or not. If you resist Me who has actually come to help you, will I not be grieved? If you keep on grieving Me, I may become quiet. It's not good for you, beloved (Gal 5:16).

I am a "holy" Spirit. I cannot tolerate anything unclean in you. You are My temple.

How can I see My temple being defiled? (1 Cor 6:19). I create in you a love for holiness and a hatred for sin. Keep your conscience sharp and clear. Don't close yourself when I turn My searchlight on you (Rev 2:23). If you run away from Me without hearing My voice, you will become an easy prey to Satan who is roaming about as a reavenous wolf and a roaring lion. If you must chase the devil, you need My backing. I will stand with you only when you stay submitted to Me (Js 4:5,7).

The enemy comes in like a flood, suddenly and overwhelmingly. Don't be scared. Hold your ground. I will lift up a battle flag against him (Isa 59:19b). I will also train your hands and fingers how to wield My sword against the spiritual powers of wickedness (Eph 6:12,17). The devil has no argument against My Word and Christ's blood. But don't expect instant victories. The war may be long drawn. The devil will not easily give up. Keep drawing from My plentiful riches and drinking from My perennial rivers lest you get exhausted. It is neither by might nor by power but by Me all battles are won (Zech 4:6).

If you lose a battle don't get discouraged. For My people failure is never final. As long as I am here with you, and the

Father and the Son are up there for you, don't quit. Come apart with Me and I will tell you why you failed. You will become more than a conqueror.

r I am grieved when I see My people walking around with long faces. Your life on earth will not be without worries but you must learn to live above them (Jn 16:33b). I am the River of Joy. I proceed from the Throne in Heaven and flow through the Church on earth. Have a bath in My waters. Sit under the trees on the banks. You will be healed of your hurts (Psa 46:4,5; Rev 22:1,2). I am the Wind of Heaven. Enjoy My breeze. Your heaviness will flee. I am the Oil of Gladness. Apply it on your head. You will be relieved of tensions. I will turn your mourning into dancing.

When problems mount up and pains increase, remember you are not alone. I am not just *with* you, but *in* you! (Jn 14:17b). I understand your pain more than you feel it, because as God resident in you nothing is hidden from Me. I suffer with you (Isa 63:9). I am your Comforter for ever. I will strengthen your weak hands and feeble knees. Lean on Me, My child, lean on Me! I will heal your broken heart. I will give you beauty for ashes and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness (Isa 61:1-3).

Physical pleasures like eating and drinking don't last long. Revel in Me. That's what life in God's Kingdom means (Rom 14:17). I make the joy and peace of Jesus real to you. It's what the world cannot give or understand or take away (Jn 14:26,27).

Sometimes you may feel lonely and orphaned. You would wonder whether I had left you. Remember, dear child, I don't make shunting trips between Heaven and earth according to My moods and your condition. No, I am always with you whether you feel so or not (Jn 14:16b). If I have to vacate your heart everytime you displease Me, I cannot be resident in any saint on earth (Psa 51:11).

r I want to bring you out of your apprehensions to witness for Christ. You are afraid that people might mock at you. Your throat chokes everytime you want to open your mouth to share the gospel. The fear of ridicule silences you. Don't feel bad about it, My child. This was the problem of the disciples of Jesus also eventhough they had walked with Him for over three years. Can you imagine how a key figure like Peter could ever deny and disown Christ? Their weakness overpowered their willingness. The problem was solved by My coming. That's

why Jesus wouldn't let them go out until they got filled with My power (Acts 1:4). When I came upon them, the cowards became challengers!

Be filled with Me. Don't consider your timidity or boast of your oratory skill. Depend on Me. I will grant you boldness in all situations to speak forth the message of the Cross (Acts 4:31). Your educational qualification is not the criterion. You will see souls saved when you witness to them for Christ in My power (Acts 1:8).

I will equip you with My gifts (1 Cor 12:7-10). You can discern spirits. You can drive out demons. You can deliver people from sin and sickness. You can demonstrate My power through signs and wonders. You can denounce evil through prophetic words. You can declare words of faith into hopeless situations. You can demoralise the enemy's agents. You can dethrone wicked powers from governmental seats. You can declutch youth from drugs and deception. All these and more in My power!

Satan will fight against you tooth and nail when you go proclaiming the Gospel. He will not easily loosen his grip on souls. Just because you go in My power, don't think he will stay silent. He will insti-

gate people to work against you. He will incite them to beat or burn you. I won't promise that no stone pelted at you will hit you, but I will make your face angelic even if you will have to bleed to death. I will keep your spirit sweet and not turn bitter against the persecutors (Acts 6:15; 7:60). You will overflow with My joy (Acts 13:50-52). I will rest on you as the Spirit of Glory (1 Pet 4:14). Take heart!

As much as I anoint your words I will also adorn your life with My fruit. I will radically change your temperament if you let Me work deeply in you. I will make you a loving Christian, joyful friend, peaceful citizen, patient sufferer, kind boss, good neighbour, faithful husband, meek wife and self-controlled minister (Gal 5:22,23). There will be no argument against a life well lived.

r My child, I want to help you in your job also. It is my desire to make you efficient and effective in your career. When you depend on My power and seek My wisdom, you will shine in whichever field I place you. If you are a doctor, with My help you can treat better; if an engineer, build better; if a professor, teach better; if an artist, paint better; if a farmer, cultivate better; if a housewife, love better; and if a student, learn better!

I filled Joseph with My wisdom and he saved Egypt in famine. I filled Bezaleel with understanding and he excelled in artistic works for the Temple. I filled Daniel with knowledge and he interpreted My revelations for kings. I am the Spirit of Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Might and Knowledge (Isa 11:2). There is no work or profession where I cannot help you. But what I told you I am telling you again: You must ask for My help, accept it and acknowledge it.

I will fill you afresh each morning when you wait before Me before starting off to work. My presence will be with you in the workspot.

Offices, workshops and business centres all over the world are plagued with corruption. Say no to malpractices. Dare to be different. I will strengthen you. Through you I will burn the chaff. Your superiors and colleagues will come to you for counsel because I have filled you with My wisdom (Gen 41:37-40). If you are treated unjustly, turn to Me. I will fill you with the fruit of patience. Promotion comes from Me.

r I want you to enjoy good health. Your body is mortal but I am there to vitalise it (Rom 8:11). Your body is My temple. I

desire to see it in good shape. I will cause My healing virtue flow into it. Appropriate the blessings of the Cross. I will apply them on you.

I have endowed the Church with the gifts of healing. Pray for one another in faith. You will see the gifts operating. I also want you to enjoy soundness in mind.

My dear child, you are engaged to be married to Jesus. I will be with you until I reach you Home safe into His loving arms. Together as the Spirit and the Bride, let's say, Amen!

5

Power of Prayer

THE key verse for the Acts of the Apostles is Chapter 1 Verse 8. The key word for this book, found in this very verse, is POWER. The release of God's power in the life of the early Church, as described in the Book of Acts, was through PRAYER. There are nearly twentyfive references to prayer in this book. Prayer was the lifeline of the early disciples.

Some of us leaders of the Blessing Youth Mission gathered up on a hill in South India for a couple of days in 1997 to remeditate the Book of Acts which we consider as the textbook on missions and evangelism. We were thrilled to find out again that the solemn secret of power of the early Christians was prayer, and the reproachable reason for our powerlessness was prayerlessness. Our collective

meditation of the first seven of the twentyeight chapters of Acts is given here as a sample to drive you to your knees to experience the explosive power of God in your life and ministry.

Acts 1:14/2:1

“They all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication... Now when the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.”

This very first reference to prayer emphasizes oneness or single-mindedness among God’s people. This is a fundamental requirement for God to bless any work undertaken by His people.

The disciples “continued” in prayer. In his Gospel, Luke reports that they had been “continually” in the temple praising and blessing God (Lk 24:53). What made them to pray like this? The Lord burdened them and drove them to their knees. As per the prophecy in Zechariah 12:10, God poured out on the disciples “the Spirit of supplication” so they might look unto Him. When God gives us an irresistible urge and an increasing burden to pray, it’s a prediction of Rain from Heaven.

Prayers for revival must be focussed on God’s promises rather than our

programmes. The disciples were longing for “the Promise of the Father” (Acts 1:4). Promise-based prayers must get priority over programme-oriented petitions. We have the promise, “There shall be showers of blessing” (Ezek 34:26). Mercy drops round us have been falling. But where are the “showers”?

Unless we realize that revival is our “need,” we will not plead for it. Blessed are those who “hunger and thirst” for righteousness (the revelation of God’s awesome holiness in revival); for they shall be filled.

In God’s economy, the leaders are the first to experience revival. Psalm 85:6 is a cry of the leaders: “Will You not revive US again, that Your people may rejoice in You?” It is from the “head” that the oil flows through the beard to the “garments” (Psa 133:2). Only when the leaders are revived, people can truly rejoice!

Revival affects three circles of people — (a) the house of David; (b) the inhabitants of Jerusalem; (c) the entire land (Zech 12:10; 13:1,2). This is outlined both in Christ’s promise and Peter’s preaching (Acts 1:8; 2:39). The impact of the Kingdom manifestation is felt first in the church and then in its neighbourhood and finally

in the regions beyond. It is both geographical (Acts 1:8) and generational (2:39).

1:24,25

“They prayed and said, You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen to take part in this ministry and apostleship.”

The solution to any leadership crisis is, “Let’s pray!”

Man respects qualifications, but God regards qualities. Leadership choice is based on the condition of the heart rather than the knowledge of the head or the skill of hands. The apostles aptly addressed their prayer to the Lord who knows the “hearts” of all.

They prayed for a person for “ministry and apostleship.” This is what differentiates a spiritual leader from his secular counterpart. The former is both a servant and a leader. In other words, he is a leader just to serve people.

The choice of leadership was a collective exercise. “They” proposed (1:23). Peter of course initiated it. Screening the candidates and shortlisting them in an atmosphere of prayer is the order. The

practice of casting lots is quite different from that of casting votes. When they cast lots, there was no room for finding out the majority support but it was a method to ascertain divine choice.

There’s a lamentable leadership vacuum all over the Church in the age group of 30 to 40. Too many old leaders are blocking the emergence of too many young leaders. We forget that the main actors in the Pentecostal outpouring must be “sons, daughters and young men” (Acts 2:17). Only after these young-blooded visionaries there come grey-headed dreamers! We must not hesitate to radically alter or change organisational structures. New wine cannot be kept in old wineskins. Constitutions, rules and regulations are not eternal. God wiped away what He Himself once wrote! He took it “out of the way!” (Col 2:14). Yes, too often the old system blocks the way for the new Spirit! Let’s open the windows of our organisations to let in fresh air. Young people suffer from suffocation.

Let nights of prayer be organized everywhere to agonize on knees before God for the birth of a new generation of leaders. Jesus spent all night in prayer before He chose the twelve to carry on His ministry.

2:42

“They continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”

We must long for such a thing told about our new converts and new congregations. They “continued steadfastly” in prayer. Ministers should endeavour to sustain the initial enthusiasm in prayer in the new believers. Reasons for losing interest in praying must be tackled.

Praying cannot be taught in isolation. It belongs to a package of four exercises. The other three are learning, fellowshiping and breadbreaking. In teaching or learning, the Word of God is the focus. In fellowshiping, the Spirit of God is the binding force. In breadbreaking, the Lamb of God is the centre. In praying, the Father God is addressed as the Sovereign Source. All these four are interlinked. One leads to the other. These four items are given as two duplets—“teaching and fellowship,” “breaking of bread and prayers.” The Word of God gives us “an inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32). It is the shed blood of Christ which has opened the way into the Holiest to approach the Throne of Grace in prayer (Eph 2:13,18; Heb 4:14-16).

Collective prayers are powerful. It’s like sticks burning together. One helps the other to stay aflame. The immediate outcome of a church continuing steadfastly in prayer is reported as “fear on every soul” (v43). A solemn fear within the church and a striking terror without! A praying church will be known for its electrifying presence in the community. It cannot be ignored.

3:1

“Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.”

The church was swelling up in numbers. In a single day the strength increased from hundred and twenty to three thousand plus. “Now” the top leaders went out to pray. They did not let anything, even the work of God, to crowd out prayer. Preaching becomes sterile when praying is skeletonised. Time with God improves the quality of our time with people. Neglect of prayer has cost us dearly.

The congregational members were praying continually (2:42c). Nevertheless the leaders withdrew for prayer (3:1). This they must have learnt from their Master who had often withdrawn from crowds to places of solitude for prayer. The people

may pray sincerely for the preachers, but the preachers must do their own praying. Praying is like breathing. I must breathe for myself for fresh oxygen. Depending solely on the prayers of others is like being constantly on a ventilator!

The discipline of prayer begins with the setting apart of a time for prayer. For the early believers the ninth hour, which is afternoon three, was the “hour of prayer.” This Jewish custom was perhaps followed by the God-fearing Gentiles also. Cornelius had this practice (Acts 10:30). There was nothing sacred about the ninth hour. But it was at this hour that Jesus gave up His spirit. Instantly the veil of the temple tore from top to bottom, signifying the opening of the way into the holiest as a thoroughfare prayer passage! (Mt 27:46,51).

Even administrative leaders of the church cannot exempt themselves in setting aside uninterrupted times for prayer. David the King and Daniel the Governor maintained times of prayer amidst their weighty administrative responsibilities (Psa 55:17; Dan 6:10). Prayertime must be considered as our appointment with the King of kings. Think of servants who do not meet with their masters for daily orders!

It was an “hour” of prayer. Not just a few minutes of silence for a short and

sweet prayer! Is an hour with God every-day too much? We talk so much about tithing of our money. How about tithing of our time? Many have not learnt the art of intercession even after being believers for decades, because they don't habitually spend unhurried time in the prayer closet. How many hours and years one spends in classrooms, laboratories and workshops to become an engineer or a doctor! Until the traditional hour of prayer is restored, the alarming scarcity of prayer warriors will continue.

Not only maintaining a prayer hour but also having a prayer partner is a secret of prayer power. “Peter and John” are an interesting combination. Peter known for slumber and John known as a son of thunder coming together in prayer partnership was a real wonder! Though they were temperamentally quite different from each other, they had significant roles to play in the work of the Kingdom. Peter had been given the keys of the Kingdom for its expansion and John would be given the revelation of the Kingdom in its exaltation. It is when the leaders of churches and organisations come together for prayer, both within their own set-up and with those of other ministries, “notable miracles” would follow (4:16). Praise God for national and international conferences and consul-

tations for Christian leaders. Sadly a major part of the time is spent on paper presentations and group discussions, but very little on united intercessions. No wonder there are no wonders happening after such get-togethers.

Each Christian must find a prayer partner and make a mutual covenant for heart-to-heart fellowship and prayer. "How can one be warm alone?" (Eccl 4:11).

4:24-31

"So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: 'Lord, You are God, who made heavens and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: Why did the nations rage and the people plot vain things?... For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the Name of Your holy Servant Jesus.' And when they had prayed,

the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness."

Persecution must not throw us into panic but drive us to prayer. Because, in the actual sense no persecution is against us. It's against our Lord. The apostles rightly recognized the threats of the religious leaders "truly" as a campaign "against Jesus." When Christians are reproached, it is actually Christ who is blasphemed (1 Pet 4:14). When Saul went about persecuting the Church, Jesus stopped him with the question, "Why are you persecuting Me?" (Acts 9:4,5). This understanding gives us vigorous confidence in the midst of threats and persecutions. Christ is the Head. The Church is His body. Can anything happen to the body without the knowledge of the head? "He who touches you touches the pupil of His eye" (Zech 2:8).

This prayer following persecution is known for its theological soundness. They addressed the Father God as the Lord, the Creator, the Revealer and the Sovereign (4:24,25a,28). The deeper we grow in the knowledge of God, the stronger we become in our prayer life. As we get acquainted with the One on the Throne more and more, better will we know how to com-

municate with Him. This is where a systematic study of the Scriptures becomes a must for a healthy prayer life. The Messianic prophecy through David in Psalm 2 gave the disciples the key to interpret their situation from divine perspective. Neglect of Bible study will adversely affect the quality of prayer.

Most of the persecutions today against missionary evangelism are threefold in nature — political (Herod and Pilate), ethnic (Gentiles) and religious (People of Israel) — just like what the early church faced. The same was outlined by David— “nations... people... kings and rulers.” The disciples did not pray to the Lord to stop the persecutors from threatening them or disturbing the work. They had learnt from the sufferings of Jesus that whatever was done to the Son of God by His executors was whatever God’s hand and His purpose had determined before to be done (4:28). God on the throne has no surprises and He is in absolute control.

Then what did they pray for? For boldness (4:29). It was a God-pleasing prayer. God instantly answered it with exactly what they asked for. The disciples had already been baptised with the Holy Spirit. Now they were given a fresh filling of the Spirit. The result? “And they spoke

the Word of God with boldness” (4:31c). Apostle Paul’s repeated requests to churches during his missionary imprisonment was just this. “Pray for me that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak” (Eph 6:19,20).

Does this mean that we cannot ask God to stop persecutions? We can. But God may or may not answer such prayers positively. In the wisdom of God, persecution has so many blessed effects on the church. Persecutions serve as fires of purification and as a motivating force for propagation. But prayer for boldness will be assuredly answered.

Alongwith boldness the disciples prayed for a spectacular manifestation of God’s power through healings, signs and wonders. When God performs attesting miracles for the message, the messengers are further encouraged to push on unstopped (Mk 16:20). The twentieth century Christianity in an age of science has quietly dispensed with the spectacular and the supernatural. Miracles are miracles! They have no equal or substitute in missions and evangelism. Missionary prayer partners in their prayers for missionaries should

not miss out this element. We need more miracles today than anytime in history. The stress in “the Name” of Jesus in this prayer is to be noted (4:30). In the Great Commission Jesus emphasized it too. “In My Name they will...” (Mk 16:15-17).

6:4

“But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.”

Those called primarily for the ministry of the Word must save as much time as possible to spend alone with God to “know His will,... and hear the voice of His mouth” (Acts 22:14). They should not entangle themselves in business and administrative affairs of the ministry. One of the preachers of old recommended one week of preparation for one hour of preaching. Sermons may be prepared in the library or with a laptop. But messages can be received only when we sit before the Lord. Preaching is too eternal a business to be done with mere intellectual powers.

We have enough methods, money and machinery in our ministries, but where is the message? It is not wrong to quote what Dr. So-and-So has said, but where is the declaration, “Thus says the Lord”? The sheep are starving because many

shepherds exhaust their time and energy in the management of orphanages and administration of schools. The sermons preached in several Sunday services are just frozen stuff reheated. Why don't we follow the apostolic method of leaving the financial and administrative responsibilities with trusted men having the Spirit and skill ? (Acts 6:3).

No preacher should excuse himself for lack of prayer and preparation because of too much work. Will a nation excuse the poor performance of its sportspeople in an international event because of inadequate preparation and practice? Let's dare not climb the pulpit until we have heard from God in the closet! John the Baptist was strengthening his spiritual muscles in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel (Lk 1:80).

6:5,6

“And they chose Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.”

The spirit and influence of prayer was felt in all the “acts” of the apostles. Saturation with prayer was the secret of their

phenomenal growth. The laying on of hands on this first batch of deacons was not just for a ceremonial ordination, but for a spiritual impartation. There was praying “before” laying on of hands.

The nextline leaders will emphasize prayer only to the extent their top leaders practise it. Fire begets fire. When congregations and ministries grow cold in prayer, it will do well for the leaders to take stock of their own prayer life. It was the prayer life of Jesus which inspired His disciples to learn more about prayer (Lk 11:1).

7:59,60

“And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not charge them with this sin.’ And when he had said this, he died.”

Though Stephen had been chosen just to administer food distribution to widows, he was a man of prayer. His prayer of martyrdom tells us a lot about his prayer life. He obviously had had a habit of praying regularly for himself and for others. A man’s inner character is seen at the hour of crisis. The meditation of the prayers of

Jesus on the Cross had left a lasting impression on Stephen. The Lord Jesus who had already “sat” at the Father’s right hand was now seen “standing,” perhaps to honour and welcome the first martyr of the Church who was following His footsteps (Mk 16:19; Acts 7:56).

The persecuted Church is the most neglected segment in Christendom. Rarely do we come across a Christian group which regularly prays for persecuted Christians. We cannot afford to forget those mistreated for the gospel, because they and we belong to the same Body (Heb 13:3). Interceding regularly for the persecuted Christians is the first step in identifying ourselves with them. The byproduct of such an exercise is that we will be steadily prepared for persecution and eventual martyrdom if it is in the will of God. Prayer for the suffering Christians awakens in us, in the words of Watchman Nee (1903-1972), “a mind to suffer.”

Stephen, Peter and Paul had visions of open Heaven and such visions were associated with prayer. Stephen’s vision prepared him for martyrdom. Peter’s vision propelled him into cross-cultural evangelism. And Paul’s visions pounded him to walk humbly and rejoice in weakness. These days we hear preachers narrating

their trips to heaven during their fasting prayers. But the outcome of such claims seems to accomplish little for the life of the Church and the expansion of the Kingdom. Don't fantasize but meditate on the glories of Heaven and the groans of Hell as revealed in the Scriptures. This way our prayers will affect earth and eternity.

Even while Stephen was being stoned and obviously bleeding severely, he "knelt down" to say his last prayer. This most graceful posture of kneeling in prayer is subtly dismissed as a mere cultural practice. Don't we believe that one day every "knee" shall bow before Christ? If we spiritualize this act, how about every "tongue" confessing Him as Lord? Even if kneeling had been a Jewish practice in the Middle East, is there a better bodily posture to express humility and submission? Slack postures will slacken prayer.

(Dear reader, I urge you to meditate the remaining 21 Chapters (75%) of the Book of Acts on knees to catch the spirit of prayer of the early Church. I assure you that the fire of God will fall on your prayer altar and endue you with power as you have never experienced before.)

6

Gifts of Power

A renewed interest worldwide in spiritual gifts is a positive sign that God is out to manifest His power through His people as in the days of old. The latter rain promises are being fulfilled (Joel 2:23-29). Gifts are the tools of God's power to finish His task on earth. If we don't use them, His cause will suffer.

The lists of gifts

Spiritual gifts are listed atleast in six places in the New Testament.

a) Mark 16:17,18, "These signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will handle snakes; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; and they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

b) Romans 12:6-8, "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness."

c) 1 Corinthians 12:7-10, "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom thro' the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge thro' the same Spirit, to another faith thro' the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another the ability to prophesy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues."

d) 1 Corinthians 12:28, "God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues."

e) Ephesians 4:7-11, "To each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift... And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers."

f) 1 Peter 4:10,11, "As each one has received a gift, minister to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the messages of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ."

Certain observations stand out clearly as we study these six passages.

1. Gifts are given to everyone.

There is no deluxe group among Christians called gifted people. ALL the children of God are gifted. Not a single believer is giftless.

The Church is the Body of Christ. Each believer is a member of it (1 Cor 12:27). The Bible compares these members to the organs of the human body (1 Cor 12:14-27). Each organ is capable of a specific function. The eyes have the gift (ability) of seeing. The ears have the gift of hearing. The tongue has the gift of tasting and talking. The nose that of smelling. The skin that of feeling. Also each of the hidden parts is gifted for an important function. The heart is for blood circulation. The lungs are for breathing. The liver for detoxication. The bowels for digestion. And so on.

In the parable of talents we find each of the servants given one or more talents (Mt 25:14,15). None with nothing!

2. The measure of gifting is different.

The “measure of faith” varies from person to person (Rom 12:3). The gifts differ “according to the grace that is given to us” (Rom 12:6; 1 Pet 4:11). The Holy Spirit is “distributing to each one individually” (1 Cor 12:11). He does not dump all the gifts on one person. He distributes! Each one of us is given grace “according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (Eph 4:7).

Look at the parable of talents again. One servant was given five talents, another two and the third just one. This distribution was according to each one’s ability (Mt 25:15). That is, according to what the master had known that each one could accomplish. Neither unemployment nor underemployment!

3. Gifts are already given.

“God *has* dealt...” (Rom 12:3). “*Having* then gifts...” (Rom 12:6). “The manifestation of the Spirit *is given*...” (1 Cor 12:7). “God *has* appointed...” (1 Cor 12:28). “To each one of us *was* given...” (Eph 4:7). “As each one *has* received a gift” (1 Pet 4: 10).

When we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and receive the Holy Spirit, we are placed in the Body of Christ with specific functions and suitable gifts (1 Cor 12:18). Our responsibility is to “use” the gifts and fulfill the function (Rom 12:6a). Sadly, in each of us lies so much dormant and unused. Let’s “stir up the gift” that’s in us (2 Tim 1:6,7). Even a close disciple of Paul like Timothy needed this reminder!

The distribution of gifts is according to God’s will rather than our wish. “One and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as HE wills.” “God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as HE pleased” (1 Cor 12:11,18). “Desiring” spiritual gifts is so as to manifest what we have rather than to receive what we have not (1 Cor 14:1). In the same verse Paul wrote, “Pursue love.” He simply meant we must show or manifest love.

When God appoints us in specific responsibilities, He of His own will grants us appropriate gifts. When Jesus called twelve of His disciples to go forth as apostles, He gave them the gifts of healing and miracles (Mt 10:1-5). Similarly Timothy received a particular gift when he was commissioned by the elders for a specific ministry (1 Tim 4:14). Which

captain will send his soldiers to the battle without equipping them?

4. There are still other gifts.

As we compare these lists of gifts, one with another, it is apparent that no list is exhaustive but only suggestive. There are undoubtedly several other gifts not mentioned explicitly in these lists. Here are some examples—

God has gifted so many of His saints to compose songs of inspiration, sing so sweetly and play extolling music. King David was one such unusually gifted person. He was called the “anointed... sweet psalmist of Israel” (2 Sam 23:1).

A severe fever made Fanny Crosby (1823-1915) blind when she was six weeks old. She died at 95. The Lord unusually gifted her and she composed nearly 8000 hymns which never grew old. “*Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine*” is one of them!

Both in the celebration and the proclamation of His praise, God has used arts widely. He filled Bezaleel with His Spirit “in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to design artistic works” for the House of Worship (Ex 31:1-5). Brother Navaneethar

of Friends Missionary Prayer Band in India is a modern example. His paintings and drawings have challenged so many and catapulted them to the mission fields.

Mastering new languages, in short durations at that, has been possible to pioneer missionaries and Bible translators because of God’s gifting. Otherwise how would it have been possible for William Carey (1761-1834), the English missionary, to translate the Bible into so many Indian vernaculars? God gifted him and he laboured tirelessly. He expected great things from God and attempted great things for Him!

God is sovereign. His resources are inexhaustible. Once a little boy was trying to empty the ocean with a bucket. We are equally ignorant when we say there are only nine gifts!

Someone may argue that singing, painting, learning languages, etc., are just “talents” and not gifts. But it is God who gives talents. Whatever God gives is a gift. 1 Corinthians 4:7 explains this: “Who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you glory as if you had not received it?” The so-called “natural” talents must be consecrated at God’s altar to be used for His supernatural purpose!

Having established that all believers are gifted, let's now proceed to find out how to recognize or identify one's gift and operate it. Consider these four questions.

1. Where is your interest?

Find out which area of ministry appeals to you most. It is God who works in you "both to desire and to do" for His good pleasure (Phil 2:13).

To sort out the problems in food distribution, seven men were chosen and appointed exclusively for this business. But Stephen and Philip, who were the first two of the seven member team, had their hearts craving more and more for evangelism. The former started his campaign right in Jerusalem and the latter went out to Samaria. The gifts associated with evangelism, namely healing and working of miracles, began to gloriously operate through both of them (Acts 6:5,8; 8:5-7).

Gifts of healings and working of miracles are sign gifts mainly for evangelism and missionary work. Jesus gave His disciples these gifts while sending them forth as travelling missionaries (Mt 10:1,7,8). He mentioned these gifts alongside the Great Commission (Mk 16:15,17,18). Paul writes about how God worked "signs and won-

ders" thro' him in his missionary tours (Rom 15:18,19). God's anointing on Jesus manifested itself through acts of healing and deliverance when He went out to do good to the lost (Acts 10:38). You too can expect the same in your ministry if your field of interest is reaching the lost.

2. Where do you excel?

If you don't have specific interest in any particular type of ministry, keep watching to locate where you fare better than in other areas.

For example, you may find yourself doing well as a helper to others. There's a gift called "helps" which is mentioned immediately after the gifts of healings in the list of 1 Corinthians 12:28. It is one of the most important but least coveted gifts today. No leader or preacher, however gifted, can accomplish his task without sincere and faithful helpers. These are those who don't covet the limelight but stay in the background assisting those whom God uses in public. Someone named them as unsung heroes!

When you give yourself more and more to the area of ministry where you fare well, you will grow in it. Paul admonished Timothy, "Do not neglect the gift

that is in you... Give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all” (1 Tim 4:14,15). The Lord will promote those who are faithful over a few things (Mt 25:21).

3. What is your responsibility?

Give yourself entirely to whatever work God has assigned to you. “Not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord” (Rom 12:11). You will notice the relevant gifts operating automatically.

If you are called to preach or teach God’s Word, keep doing it faithfully. The gifts of Word of Wisdom, Word of Knowledge, Prophesying, Teaching (Rom 12:7b), etc., will operate either singly or in combination, while you are communicating the message.

Suppose your work is to be a counselor, you can expect the gifts of Discernment, Word of Wisdom, Word of Knowledge, Prophecy, Exhortation (Rom 12:8a), Encouragement (Acts 4:36), etc., to operate thro' you.

Gifts of Administrations (1 Cor 12:28), Faith (to venture like George Muller), Diligence (Rom 12:8b), etc., are associated with the ministry of leadership.

Those who go as missionaries experience a variety of gifts bestowed on them. The gift of Faith propels them to the fields, to go sacrificing comforts, risking life and never returning (Heb 11:8,17,15). The story of the *Peace Child* is a powerful example of the gift of the Word of Wisdom. When peculiar problems arise in interpreting the gospel message in a complex cultural context, the gift of Word of Knowledge helps to find solutions. Apostle James manifested this gift in the Jerusalem council to solve a missionary problem among gentiles (Acts 15:13-22). Paul just like that shook off a viper which fastened on his hand (Acts 28: 3-5). It was Mark 16:18a in fulfilment. Missionaries in jungles have numerous testimonies of miraculous deliverance from poisonous insects. Drinking water facility is poor in many mission fields. Missionaries have to drink all sorts of water. They claim the sign of Mark 16:18b and are safe.

Some are called to the ministry of poor feeding, relief works, helping the orphans, etc. “Showing mercy with cheerfulness” is an indispensable gift for them (Rom 12:8). An unusual smile worn by these men and women even amidst trying situations is the proof of their gift! “Liberality in giving” is another gift for this kind of ministry (Rom 12:8). Without the gift of

“ministering” or serving, one cannot be successful in such assignments (Rom 12:7a).

A scientific analysis is not necessary to define which is the exact gift that’s operating in a given situation. Also, no announcement needs be made before any gift begins to manifest! Just like the functioning of the organs of the human body, the gifts operate in harmony and with natural supernaturalness.

4. Where is the need?

Rush to the needy place and people. God manifests His gifts and power when He is moved by the needs of the people.

Physicians should be where the sick are. Concerning the gifts poured out by Christ through His Spirit, David prophesied, “You have received gifts among men, even among the rebellious, THAT the Lord God might dwell there” (Psa 68:18,19).

Miracles are rare in programmes where the participants are mostly Christians. On the other hand, healings and miracles are commonplace in outreach programmes for non-Christians. What is the secret? Isaiah has the answer: “I was found by those who did not ask for Me. But to Israel He says: All day long I have stretched

out My hands to a disobedient and contrary people” (Rom 10:20,21).

Nominal Christians already know that Christ came, died and rose again. What they need is not evangelistic wonders but prophetic warnings! (Mt 12:38,39). Christ is not interested in repeating miracles for stiffnecked and unbelieving Christian communities. How He rebuked the people of Cana, Chorazin and Capernaum for their unrepentant attitude! (Jn 4:46-48; Mt 11: 20-24).

Go to regions where Christ is not named. Visit villages to meet downtrodden people. Rush to flood-affected and famine-hit areas and such places where natural calamities have left the people shattered and miserable. Go to hills and jungles where tribals live under superstitious beliefs and fears for centuries. When you preach the gospel to the “poor,” the underprivileged, the unreached and the uncared for, miraculous gifts will operate! (Lk 7:22; 4:18,19).

Gifts and spirituality

Though the distribution or manifestation of gifts is not based on our merits, we have a tremendous spiritual responsibility in exercising the gifts. Soliders warm

themselves up each morning. Only then they stay fit. So also we should build ourselves up by praying in the Holy Spirit (Jude 20). A “perpetual” fire should burn on the altar of our devotional life. It shall never go out (Lev 6:12,13). Moses first went “in” to meet the Lord before he came “out” to bless the people (Lev 9:23). Gifts are tools. They must be oiled or sharpened through “prayer and fasting” (Mt 17:19-21). Sufficient time must be given to regular meditation and systematic study of the Word. This will give us wisdom to use the gifts rightly and avoid misuse.

7

Signs and Wonders

NO one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him” (Jn 3:2). These words of Nicodemus, a Jewish teacher, to Jesus reflect the age-old Hebrew thinking.

Yes, Jehovah is a God of miracles! The very constitution of the nation of Israel was in an atmosphere of signs and wonders. The people of God witnessed mighty miracles of His outstretched arm in Egypt, in the Red Sea and in the Wilderness. But when they went astray from God, miracles became rare. Once Judge Gideon asked the Angel of the Lord who appeared to him, “If the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about?” (Judg 6:13).

As for God, He has never changed. His power is still the same. But there are

those who argue that the days of miracles are past. Yes, for them! According to one's faith it shall be unto him! If we believe, we shall see the glory of God (Jn 11:40).

Miracles are a means of God to reveal His glory. Commenting on the first miracle of Jesus, John writes, "This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory" (Jn 2:11). As a result of the miracles through Paul in Asia, "the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified" (Acts 19:17).

The very name of Jesus is "Wonderful" (Isa 9:6). Miracles were the order of His ministry. When John the Baptist wanted to check whether Jesus was the Messiah or had they to look for another, this was Jesus' reply: "The blind receive their sight and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up..." (Mt 11:5). In his inaugural address on the Day of Pentecost, Peter presented Jesus of Nazareth as "a Man attested by God by miracles, wonders and signs" (Acts 2:22).

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever!" (Heb 13:8). The Church is His Body. We are the Church. So we are His feet. We are His hands. What He did on earth 2000 years ago, He can and

will do today through us. He promised, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father" (Jn 14:12). Faith is the key.

When the Church loses its dynamic faith, it becomes a monument, no more a movement. It becomes joyless and helpless. All its ceremonies, however beautiful, cannot help a man lying paralysed at its gate (Acts 3:2). It was an awful sight at the "Beautiful" Gate! But two men bathed afresh in Pentecostal power changed a sad history of 40 years!

We often warn the Church of its **Pharisaical** attitude — that better-than-thou spirit (Jn 9:34). The Church also has lots of **Sadducees** — those who deny all that's miraculous and supernatural (Acts 23:7,8). One of the most common names in Acts for the saints is BELIEVERS (Acts 5:14). That is, those who believe in the "Word of God" and the "Power of God." When we leave out one or the other we are only SEMI-BELIEVERS! (Mt 22:23-29).

A fresh understanding of who our God is, is necessary. Because, only those "who know their God shall be strong and carry out great exploits" (Dan 11:32). "God does

great things past finding out, yes, wonders without number" (Job 9:10). "Who is so great a God as our God? You are the God who does wonders; You have declared Your strength among the peoples" (Psa 77:13,14). "He alone does great wonders" (136:4).

William Carey (1761-1834) shouted, "Expect great things from God; Attempt great things for God!" We expect but don't attempt! The disciples asked the Lord what they must do to work the works of God. Jesus answered, "Believe!" (Jn 6:28,29).

With God all things are possible (Lk 1:37). "Imp" means devil. He is the one who implants the word "imp-ossible" in our minds. He is a liar. Ask not, "Can God?" Affirm, "God can!"

"God has appointed these in the Church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues" (1 Cor 12:28). We freely talk about "teachers" and "administrations." Why not about "miracles" and "healings?" Why this partiality to the Scriptures?

Again, from the list of the nine gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:7-10 we pick up "Wisdom," "Knowledge" and "Faith," but put aside the rest. This is

how we miss the "whole counsel" of God. Scriptures are not to be interpreted according to our convenience and condition.

If we don't have miracles, signs and wonders as in the days of the apostles, we are not to immediately conclude that God has withdrawn them. On the other hand, we must cry out, "We do not see our signs; There is no longer any prophet; nor is there any among us who knows how long. O God, how long will the enemy reproach?" (Psa 74:9,10).

We don't have miracles because we have learnt to live without them. The early Church did not have all the modern equipments and facilities we use. They solely depended on the power of God. They had no magazine or media to advertise. Miracles were their unpaid agents!

The worry of the opposers of the Gospel was, "What shall we do to these men? Because, indeed, a notable miracle has been done through them is evident... and we cannot deny it" (Acts 4:16). When will our Churches earn such a testimony?

Let's repent of our unbelief. Let's shed down our unscriptural traditions. Let's throw away our meaningless ceremonies. Let's return from our backsliding. Let's rend our hearts. Let's reconcile with God.

The promise is: “Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you” (Josh 3:5).

Let’s pray like the early Church for our preachers and missionaries: “Lord, grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the Name of Your holy servant Jesus” (Acts 4:29,30). Then the Lord will work with them and confirm the Word through the accompanying signs (Mk 16:20; Acts 14:3).

We call ourselves apostolic. Well, where is the apostolic power? Where are the things that mark an apostle—signs, wonders and miracles? (2 Cor 12:12). It is not enough to be apostolic in doctrine alone. We must be apostolic in deeds also. Doctrine without deeds becomes a useless dogma. It’s like a mouth full of sand. The first book of the Church is called ACTS. But we have only WORDS! —in plenty!

Very few chapters in Acts are without a miracle. Even in a breadbreaking service there was a dead-raising sign! (Acts 20:7-12). Let our Church life and evangelism be characterized by miracles. There is no “Amen” in the Book of Acts (28:31). It’s

not over. Acts are to continue! The 29th Chapter must be about us.

Luke writes again and again that “MANY wonders and signs were done through the apostles” (Acts 2:43; 5:12; 15:12). “Lord, give us atleast SOME of them!” But God has actually promised that the end would be MORE glorious than the beginning. The glory of the latter temple shall be GREATER than that of the former.

The testimonies we hear these days are mostly of healing from head ache and hip ache. We must have miracles of born-blind seeing, stone-deaf hearing, dumb speaking, lame walking, lepers being cleansed and so on. But these won’t happen until we give ourselves to desperate praying with fasting (Mt 17:19-21). Also God should be able to trust us. He must know for sure that we have learnt to give Him all the glory. An early saint prayed, “Lord, help me never touch Your glory!”

The Bible is filled with the stories of ordinary men through whom God accomplished extraordinary things. Moses divided the Red Sea. Where is the God of Moses? Joshua stopped the Sun and the Moon. Where is the God of Joshua? Elijah brought fire from Heaven. Where is the God of Elijah? Daniel stopped the mouth

of lions. Where is the God of Daniel? And where is the God of Hebrews eleven? As we approach the end of the endtime, we can expect even greater miracles (Joel 2:28-30).

Since Pentecost, miracles were not done by the apostles only. Stephen and Philip were chosen just to distribute food. But “Stephen full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.” And “the multitudes with one accord listened to the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did” (Acts 6:8; 8:6).

Every believer can expect God to work miracles through him. Sink into your heart this promise of Jesus: “He who believes and is baptized will be saved... And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover” (Mk 16:15-18). The secret is going forth and acting on God’s Word!

The whole Church should be involved in the healing ministry of Christ. Apostle James encouraged the Christians, “Pray for one another, that you may be healed”

(Js 5:16). Pastors should take their congregations to rural situations and give them opportunity to pray for the sick and cast out demons. Then the dormant faith and the latent gifts in them will manifest. How will anyone know he has the gift of healing unless he lays hands on the sick and prays? How will anyone know he has the gift of working of miracles unless he prays over difficult cases and hard situations?

The gifts of the Spirit are not trophies to be preserved in the museum of the Church, but tools to be used in the marketplace of the world. They are utilitarian.

We are called to proclaim His salvation daily to the ends of the earth. It is “so great a salvation... God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit” (Heb 2:3,4).

There is no need to be worried about the miracles done through magic and demonic powers. They will always be there. But the rod of Aaron will devour the rods of the magicians! (Ex 7:10-12). Sorcerers like Simon and Elymas will be silenced! (Acts 8:13). Believer friend, take heart! “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 Jn 4:4).

Our land is increasing in the practice of magic, witchcraft and the like. Let's pray for an unusual manifestation of God's power as in Acts 19:19. Then the Word of the Lord shall grow mightily and prevail. Mere arguments against mystical cults won't help. We do lot of discussions, but there must be a demonstration of the Spirit's power (1 Cor 2:4,5). Money, methods and machinery are only secondary in spreading the gospel. Miracles do the job fastest.

Let's not be discouraged over failures. Not everyone who is preached to is saved. So also not everyone who is prayed for will be healed. Keep on preaching — to the sinners! Keep on praying — for the sick!

Not all those who get healed may turn to the Lord. There are people who continue in their ungodliness and idolatry even after receiving a miracle from God (Jn 12:37). We need not consider this a failure. Our God is generous. "He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Mt 5:45). We must aim at people's conversion but our attitude should be one of compassion.

Miracles are the best crowd-pullers. "A great multitude followed Jesus, because

they saw His signs" (Jn 6:2). This is still true today. Science or technology cannot quench the thirst in man to witness and experience the supernatural. Miracles in the Name of Jesus testify to His resurrection (Acts 3:14-16). They tell the world that He is alive. In one of the healing campaigns, a volunteer was wearing a T-shirt with the slogan, "If your God is dead, try mine!"

Preaching the gospel with accompanying signs and wonders is the norm of New Testament evangelism. As we saw earlier, there are some who preach the Word but are totally silent about signs and wonders. Others give all their attention to working of miracles and leave out sound and solid preaching. Both are extremes to be avoided. A happy marriage between the two will bless us with days of apostolic evangelism. Jesus said, Preach the gospel *and* heal the sick!

No doubt salvation of the soul is the greatest of all miracles. But Christ is the Lord and Saviour of the body too (1 Cor 6:13; Eph 5:23). He bore on the cross not only our sins but also our sicknesses (Isa 53:4,5; Mt 8:16,17).

Of course one may ask here, Why always talk about physiological miracles? How about physical miracles? A close look at

the ministry of Jesus reveals that miracles like turning water into wine or multiplying bread and fish were not an everyday affair. On the other hand, miracles of healing were plenty and regular. Same will be the case today. Only when the situation demands it, God will grant miracles that will bypass natural laws.

Anti-Christian forces are erupting all over India. Christian workers and missionaries are intimidated. We must witness the manifestation of God's power more than ever. When the enemy comes in like a flood, will not the Spirit of the Lord raise up a banner against him? (Isa 59:19b). Let's cooperate with God. Let's arise and put on His strength. The Lord will take away all our reproach. He will prove that He alone is God and there is no other. His promise is: "My people shall never be put to shame... Fear not!" (Joel 2:27,21). Miracles will terrorize even top leaders and politicians if they are anti-Christian (Jn 11:47,48). They will be changed (Dan 6:26,27).

Let's remove from the way all the hurdles for miracles and signs. One is *negativism*. We spend more time with Matthew 7: 21-23 than with Mark 16:17,18. We will miss the real if we keep thinking about the counterfeit all the time.

Malpractices in healing ministries and excessive emphasis on material prosperity have upset some fair-minded evangelical Christians. They have become totally antagonized towards signs and wonders. However, the remedy for misuse is not disuse but right use. Let's not throw out the baby with the bath water!

It's futile to fight against the miraculous. With all their hypocrisy, the doctrine of the Pharisees was, "Let us not fight against God" (Acts 23:9). Gamaliel, a notable Pharisee, told the persecutors of the apostles, "If it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God" (Acts 5:34,39).

Also we suffer from *groupism*. John stopped someone from casting out demons just because that person didn't belong to their group. But Jesus said, "Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is on our side" (Mk 9:38-40).

Then there is *hierarchism*. We shun and don't encourage if someone who is neither a leader nor an elder is used of the Lord to work miracles. Moses rebuked Joshua for this attitude (Num 11:24-30). When young people report of exciting things

witnessed in their evangelistic outreach programmes the elders and leaders must be thrilled, otherwise the youth will be chilled. When the seventy disciples returned with “joy” over their experiences of demon casting, Jesus “rejoiced!” (Lk 10:17,21). Oh for such leaders!

Our liberal theologians are injecting *naturalism* into our veins without our knowledge. Beware! They explain away or spiritualize all the miracles in the Bible. After the miracle of feeding the five thousand with five loaves and two fish was narrated, a child asked the teacher, “How is it possible?” The teacher answered, “Those loaves were quite big.” The child asked back, “Why should a little boy carry big loaves?”

While Jeremiah was weeping over the backslidden Israel, God asked him, “Is there anything too hard for Me?” The prophet had a ready answer, “There is nothing too hard for You!” (Jer 32:27,17). What is ours?

8

How to overpower Satan

THERE are three evils greater than evil itself. One is unbelief in the existence of Satan. Second, unmindfulness of his activities. Third, underestimation of his power. The Bible, both in the Old Testament and the New, through teaching as well as testimony, explicitly and also implicitly, exposes the character and curriculum of Satan. In the 27 books of the New Testament alone, the word “Satan” (adversary) occurs 36 times, and “Devil” (accuser) 33 times. Ralph Erskine warned God’s people with a terse statement: There is no devil so bad as no devil!

The Holy Spirit in the Scriptures for our human understanding has illustrated the carnivorous side of Satan through animals and birds. As a *serpent* he tries to deceive God’s people (Gen 3:1; 2 Cor 11:3; Rev 12:9); as a *wolf* he tries to

defeat God's flock (Jn 10:12; Mt 10:16); as a *lion* he tries to devour God's children (1 Pet 5:8); as a *bird* he tries to despoil God's harvest (Mt 13:5,19); and as a *dragon* he tries to destroy God's Son (Rev 12:1-9).

Apostle John wrote to the believers of his day, "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 Jn 4:4). This means that God alone excels Satan in power and wisdom. Even before the fall of Satan, God was higher and greater than him. That's why Satan tried to "ascend" to the throne of God (Isa 14:12-15). Even after he was cast down, he didn't lose his power. He simply lost his lofty position. He lost his innocence but not intelligence (Ezek 28:15-17; Jude 6). As far as we are concerned, there's no inherent power in us to overcome him. Even Michael the archangel at one instance had to seek the Lord's help to handle the devil (Jude 9). How much more should we depend on God to defeat this Enemy! His attacks on God's people are mutlifarious. The Omniscient God, being wiser than Satan, has supplied us suitable weapons to counterattack him. In this chapter we will consider seven of Satan's common attacks and study how you can overpower him—

1. When he challenges you...

The first two of the three typical temptations Jesus faced in the desert were a

challenge on His Sonship. The tempter came to Him and said, "*If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread... If You are the Son of God, jump down...*" (Mt 4:3,6). It was not only a challenge to Jesus but also on what God the Father had said just before Jesus went into the desert: "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (Mt 3:17). Satan put the same words of challenge in the lips of the passers-by who watched Jesus on the Cross: "*If You are the Son of God, come down from the Cross!*" (Mt 27:40).

Satan spares no saint of this temptation. He challenges every child of God about God's fatherhood towards him and his sonship. This temptation will be intense during your days of spiritual infancy as well as times of infirmity due to adversities. "How can a sinner like you suddenly become a child of God? Can this happen to you if you are a child of God?" Such questions will bombard you day and night.

To overpower Satan against this temptation, you must constantly remind yourself of the assurance of your sonship. This assurance is yours through the written Word of God and the inner voice of the Holy Spirit. Jesus combated the

devil's attack in this area by quoting on his face the Scriptures. He said, "It is *written*... It is also *written*" (Mt 4:4,7). You can say, "It is *written* that I have the right to be a child of God because I have believed on Christ and received Him" (Jn 1:12).

The assuring companionship of the Holy Spirit with Jesus was another weapon. We read that He was led into the desert "by the Spirit" and returned "in the power of the Spirit" (Mt 4:1; Lk 4:14). While talking to the Christians in Rome about suffering, Apostle Paul said, "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." Don't therefore be intimidated by any fear caused by the devil. God is your "Abba" and He is your "Father!" (Rom 8:15-18). This adoption into God's family cannot be cancelled or the authority of sonship annulled under any circumstance.

2. When he accuses you...

If you remain unshaken in your assurance of sonship in God's family, the devil will then accuse you of your past sins and present failures. He is called the "accuser of brothers" (Rev 12:10). This he does "day and night." Christ counteracts it by His advocatory ministry which He keeps doing for "ever" (Heb 7:25). The

devil is a non-stop accuser whereas Christ is the never-ceasing Advocate! Alleluia!

The devil has paralysed many Christians and killed their joy by reminding them of their past sins. He takes advantage of the lack of knowledge of God's people in this regard. God lamented through Prophet Hosea, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hos 4:6a).

For a Christian no knowledge other than what has happened to his sins is more crucial. When he realised his lostness, repented of his lax life, and received Christ as his Lord and Saviour, the same moment all his sins were blotted out. God threw the believer's sins behind His back, removed them like the clouds, and as far as the east is from the west, and sunk them into the depths of the sea. God not only forgives but also forgets our sins. He has repeatedly said that He would remember them no more (Jer 31:34c). You have no right to remember what God refuses to remember. If the devil reminds you of your past, remind him of his future! Though his origin is shrouded in uncertainty, his ultimate doom is clearly predicted (Mt 25:41; Rev 20:10).

The blood of Christ has thoroughly cleansed you and made you "whiter than

snow” as if you had never sinned! (Isa 1:18). This is the meaning of “justification.” You are not just forgiven but fully justified. Christ paid the penalty for you in full and satisfied all the requirements of a holy God. Tell the devil that you are not only cleansed but also covered by the Blood of Jesus (Rev 12:11). He has no argument against the Blood of Jesus.

What about the sins we commit “after” rebirth? Whether you sin before becoming a child of God or after, the detergent provided by God is always the same—Blood of Jesus! Christ bore on His body not only sins already committed but also those which would be committed. “It is finished!” The Lamb of God that takes away sin was slain even before the beginning of the world, not after Adam sinned. This good news will be sung throughout ages after the end of the world also! (Rev 13:8b). No believer can say he has no sin. If he says so, it is self-deception and falsehood (1 Jn 1:9). His sins of omission may not be obvious but they will outnumber his sins of commission. The only remedy is to “stay” under the stream of Immanuel’s blood. The moment you realise your sin, cry out to God for forgiveness. Go to Him in faith and confidence because Christ is there before Him advocating for you. This provision of course is not a licence to sin

but an encouragement to never give up (1 Jn 2:1).

“If God be for us, who can be against us? Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and is furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us” (Rom 8: 31-37). Shout this Scripture passage aloud in the ears of the devil when he accuses you. He will roll his tail underneath and run for life! You will come out more than a conqueror!

3. When he discourages you...

Satan has found that discouragement is the most effective of all tools he employs against God’s people. No saint in the Old or the New Testament could escape this. Otherwise how do you explain Prophet Elijah a champion on Mount Carmel becoming the coward of the worst sort next day under a juniper tree? It’s the experience of men and women of God that they get dumped in discouragement usually following a mountaintop experience with God or a meritorious exploit done for His Kingdom.

Apostle Paul enjoyed abundance of divine revelations. But he was bothered

by a thorn in the body. He calls it “a messenger of Satan” sent to beat him (2 Cor 12:7). How he wished he could get rid of it! He didn’t casually pray about it but repeatedly “pleaded” with God that this pricking arrow of Satan would be removed from him. Instead of delivering Paul from this problem, God strengthened him to live with it. It was grief no doubt, but by the grace of God the mourning was turned into dancing! (vv 9,10). The devil was defeated again. Instead of burying himself under the heaps of discouragement and depression, Paul bounced up with a hilarious declaration, “When I am weak, then I am strong!”

Life was much simpler for the earlier generations. We are at the zenith of scientific and technological advancement. We now have more gadgets and facilities than ever. But the end result is a life filled with tension and anxiety. Diseases unknown to our forefathers have become common today. Satan uses all these to discourage God’s people and depress them. But the Bible which has answers to our problems of yesterday, today and tomorrow teaches us to throw all our anxieties on God because He cares for us. Otherwise we will become an easy prey to our adversary the devil who “walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour!”

(1 Pet 5:7,8). Prayer does not guarantee solution to problems and deliverance from pain, but it promises the peace of God which is beyond understanding (Phil 4:6,7). This is the joy of the Lord which becomes your strength to resist Satan steadfastly. The knowledge that every other saint suffers like you is another encouragement (1 Pet 5:9). Worry worry until worry worries you no longer!

Satan is not only busy discouraging God’s children, but he also works against all encouragers. Apostle Paul highlights this strategy of Satan in his letter to the saints in Thessalonica while they were going through trials and tribulations. He wrote, “We wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us... when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you” (1 Thess 2:18; 3:4,5). If you are a Barnabas (= Son of Encouragement), you are sure to be hit by Baalzebub. But take heart and go on because the Holy Spirit who is an Encourager Himself backs you!

4. When he disunites you...

“Divide-and-Rule” is Satan’s time-tested strategy. Being aware of the strength of unity of God’s people, he sows among

them seeds of division cleverly and cunningly. He separates individual believers from fellowships on so-called “legitimate” grounds so he can attack them easily. Straying sheep from the flock will quickly be devoured by ravenous wolves. Hardly the devil lets two powerful ministers of the gospel stay together for long. Because, he knows that two would be stronger than one to fight or resist him (Eccl 4:9-12).

Cain murdered Abel. This was the first murder in human history. We can explain the increased rate of murder today because people watch so much of violence and crime on the TV screen. But wherefrom did Cain get the idea to murder someone? Who instigated him? Apostle John gives the answer. He says that “Cain was of the wicked one!” (1 Jn 3:12a). Satan taught blame-shifting to the first parents. He filled their first son with the spirit of envy. He entered Judas Iscariot and enticed him to betray his Lord (Lk 22:3,4). Satan is behind all relationship problems, whether it is between spouses, or among saints, or in the society. As a liar and the father of lies, he makes people believe what’s not really true and makes them suspicious of everything and everybody. God has taught us in His Word how we can overpower Satan in this battle.

r Ephesians 4:26,27, “Be angry, and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your wrath nor give place to the devil.” Holding anger for long—beyond sunset—even if it may be legitimate, gives foothold to the devil. Even God’s anger is “but for a moment” (Psa 30:5). He may make us weep in the night because of His displeasure but He sends joy in the morning because of His favour! Are we holier and greater than God? Which of us can survive if God who cannot wink at sin would hold His anger with us for ever? Hear God’s testimony: “With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you” (Isa 54:8). If you let bitterness take roots in your heart, you will fail the grace of God. Holiness cannot abide where there’s bitterness (Heb 12:14,15).

r 2 Corinthians 2:10,11, “Whom you forgive anything, I (Paul) also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.” A man in the Corinthian assembly had been living in outright adultery with his step-mother. Paul urged the Church to take disciplinary measures against him. He even ordered

the members to deliver the offender to Satan so he may suffer physically but be saved spiritually (1 Cor 5:1-5). The Church literally followed the apostle's instruction. But Paul's fatherly heart would not let the offender "be swallowed up with too much sorrow" (2 Cor 2:6,7). He urged the believers to reaffirm their love to the repentant (v8). If they had delayed their forgiveness, Satan would have taken advantage of the situation. "Operation successful, but patient died!"—This would have been the result. The devil is destructive but our Lord's ways are redemptive. God's people are called to be "saviours!" (Ob 21a).

r "Truth divides!" "Jesus did not come to send peace but sword!" These are some of the most abused quotes in Christian circles. Folks with divisive mentality use these statements to justify their acts of causing splits in Churches. The devil has a better knowledge of all the proverbs and scriptures in the world than any of us. God Himself testified about Lucifer, "You were full of wisdom" (Ezek 28:12). But the devil invariably misquotes. If he tells, "It is written," we must know how to talk back to him and say, "It is *also* written" (Mt 4:6,7). No doubt we must speak the truth, but we must speak it "in love" (Eph 4:15a). Again the sword of

separation Jesus spoke about was not among His children but between those who want to obey God's call and those who oppose it (Mt 10:34-39). How would He otherwise preach, "Blessed are the peacemakers"? Beware of the devil's representatives who are "sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit" (Jude 19). "Note those who cause divisions... and avoid them" (Rom 16:17).

r 9 out of 17 works of the flesh listed in Galatians 5:19-21, and 9 out of 9 fruits of the Spirit presented in verses 22 & 23 refer to interpersonal relationships. When we cultivate the fruit of the Spirit in our lives by diligence and discipline, the tares of the enemy which are the works of the flesh will be consumed by the fire of the Holy Spirit.

5. When he deceives you...

In his book, *Satan is no Myth*, Oswald J. Sanders (1902-1992) offers this interesting description of the counterfeit nature of Satan's schemes: Satan has his own trinity — the devil, the beast, and the false prophet (Rev 16:13); he has his own Church — "a synagogue of Satan" (Rev 2:9); he has his own ministers — "ministers of Satan" (2 Cor 11:4,5); he has formulated his own system of theology — "doctrines of demons"

(1 Tim 4:1); he has established his own sacrificial system— “The Gentiles sacrifice to demons” (1 Cor 10:20); he has his own communion service—“the cup... and the table of demons” (1 Cor 10:21); his ministers proclaim his own gospel—“a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you” (Gal 1:7,8); he has his own throne (Rev 13:2) and his own worshippers (Rev 13:4).

Deception is the most undiagnosed disease in the Church. The worst thing about deception is that the deceived persons will not know that they are deceived. The number of the deceived is increasing at an alarming rate as we approach the end of the age. When the disciples asked Jesus, “What will be the sign of Your coming, and the end of the age?,” His very first statement in reply was, “Take care that no one **deceives** you!” (Mt 24:3,4). He added that even the very elect might be deceived (v 24). Recovery from deception is extremely difficult. Prevention is better than cure. That’s why Jesus said, “See, I have told you *beforehand!*” (v 25). Let me suggest here a few safeguards against deception—

r Give top priority to Bible meditation among the other disciplines of devotional

life. The Bible admonishes us to go to the presence of God “to hear rather than to speak” (Eccl 5:1). God has magnified His Word above all things — even above His Name (Psa 138:2). If your quiet time before God is for one hour, spend 40 minutes for Bible meditation and 20 for praise and prayer. This is not the 11th Commandment to be obeyed legalistically, but I just want to stress the importance of Scripture in protecting yourself from deception.

r Be balanced. Don’t overemphasize any one truth at the cost of other truths. Deception is mostly due to eccentric emphasis of any one aspect of divine truth. That’s why God has gifted the Church with a variety of ministers. You must connect yourself to apostolic vision, prophetic insight, evangelistic passion, pastoral burden and teachers’ knowledge. If you don’t grow up thus “in all things,” you are sure to be deceived by the trickery and cunning craftiness of the devil (Eph 4:11-15). He commonly stops the ear from hearing sound doctrine before he opens it to embrace corrupt.

r Avoid interest in extra-Biblical revelations and experiences. What is plainly revealed in the Bible is more than enough for us to live a life that’s pleasing to God.

Secret things belong to God (Dt 29:29). Digging deep into extra-Biblical stuff will land you in the “depths of Satan” and not the “deep things of God” (Rev 2:24; 1 Cor 2:10). We are not obliged to embrace so-called spiritual experiences which are not taught in the Scriptures by precept and practice. “Whoever breaks the hedge will be bitten by a serpent” (Eccl 10:8). Stay clear of all occult practices. Evil spirits lie behind them (Dt 18:9-12; Isa 8:19).

6. When he opposes you...

The first time when Christ spoke about the Church, He simultaneously made reference to Hell. The words were addressed to Peter: “On this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of Hades shall not be victorious against it” (Mt 16:18). In other words, Jesus predicted that the building of the Church and the battling of Satan against it will go together. Satan will not ignore any work of the Kingdom. He will fight it tooth and nail, because any gains to the Kingdom of God is loss to his own kingdom. He will leave no genuine ministry go on unopposed. He won’t easily let go his captives from darkness into light. Therefore no opposition to God’s work should ever surprise us. Only the absence of it should! I like the way Missionary Paul puts it: “A

great and effective door has opened to me, AND there are many adversaries” (1 Cor 16:9). There are some general guidelines we can learn from the early Church to handle opposition in the ministry—

r Never get angry with the hearers of the gospel who oppose the message. They are simply victims of the Enemy. “The god of this world has blinded the minds of those who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel... should shine on them” (2 Cor 4:4). Keep proclaiming the gospel again and again faithfully and prayerfully. The gospel is the power of God that commands on the hearers, “Let there be light!”

r Pray for a mighty manifestation of God’s power which will silence the opposers (Acts 4:14). The prayer of the early Christians recorded in Acts 4:24-29 is a model prayer worth memorizing. When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will raise up a banner against him on behalf of God’s army that marches on to possess new territories (Isa 59:19b).

r Remind yourself frequently as to wherefrom you have received authority to preach the Gospel. Here’s Christ’s Great Commission: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

Go therefore!” (Mt 28:18,19). We cannot stop or return unless He orders so! Paul wrote to Timothy: “I charge you before God: Preach the Word!” (2 Tim 4:1,2). When the authorities strictly warned the apostles not to preach the gospel, they answered, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge!” (Acts 4:18,19).

r Don't be afraid! It is only natural to fear threats. But this fear can be overcome if you keep in mind the following facts: You will not die before God's appointed time; People can kill your body but cannot touch your soul; Blessed are you when you are persecuted for the Name of Christ; Anyone who touches you touches the apple of God's eye; If you have to die for the cause of the Kingdom, it is the responsibility of the Heavenly Father to take care of your family; Great will be your reward in Heaven for all that you suffer. These were the thoughts which made the persecuted disciples dance with joy (Acts 13:49-52). The devil was put to shame! God laughed!

7. When he fights you...

Satan was after Jesus from cradle to the cross. The same will be the case with you also. He will fight to the last to

destroy you. That's why Christian life is called a battle. Towards the end of his life Apostle Paul testified, “I have fought a good fight.” He has graphically explained the battle in the famous spiritual warfare passage of Ephesians 6:10-17.

“Finally, my brothers, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemings of the devil... that you may be able to withstand in the evil day... belt... breastplate... shoes... shield... helmet... sword...”

Take no chances. Leave no part of your being exposed to the darts of the devil. Be on the alert all the time. Don't be careless and casual in any area of your life. He cannot make you act against your will. Walk in truth and righteousness. Be ever ready to share the gospel. Grow in faith. Bring your thought life under the rule of God. Saturate yourself with the Word of God. Having done all, STAND! “The God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly!” (Rom 16:20). The war will end!

9

Power for Suffering

POWER! The usage of this word in Christian circles is primarily in connection with gifts and miracles. But—“Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings?” (1 Cor 12:29,30). However the one thing that is common to all, whether Christians or non-Christians, is SUFFERING.

We often hear from Christian pulpits that coming to Christ is the end of all problems. This is the greatest lie ever told! Problems and sufferings actually begin when one starts following Christ. God has one Son without sin but no son without scar! No one can escape or bypass suffering. Christian life is a life of suffering. It's a life of the Cross.

Jesus carried the Cross and died. But we first die and then bear the Cross all

our lifetime (Col 3:3; Mt 10:38). That's why Paul in his supreme pursuit of life talks first about the “power of Christ's resurrection” and then the “fellowship of His sufferings” (Phil 3:10). It is not suffering and then resurrection, but resurrection and then suffering. Before taking us through the furnace of suffering, God clothes us with His power. He equips us with power to handle suffering.

What does “fellowship with Christ's suffering” mean? Is it a gift or an enablement or an experience? Fellowship is a relationship or acquaintance which results from knowledge. The intimacy between the first man and the first woman is described as : “Adam KNEW Eve his wife” (Gen 4:1a). Fellowship with Christ's suffering primarily means the understanding of His suffering and how He handled it so we may apply those lessons in our own lives. This is what apostle John meant when he called himself a “companion in the suffering of Jesus Christ” (Rev 1:9).

The study of the suffering of Christ is too sacred to be casual about. It's a holy ground. We should remove our sandals while watching it. It was a burning bush. It was a real fire, but the flames could not consume Christ. He was “kept by the

POWER of God” while “tested by fire!” (1 Pet 1:5,7). All His life He walked through fire, but the furnace was seven times hotter than usual during the last week of His earthly life. Let’s pick up from this week five of His sufferings specifically and learn how He handled them.

1. Fear of Death

Three of the four evangelists have recorded the words of Jesus born out of the fear of death. “He took Peter, James and John with Him, and He began to be troubled and deeply distressed. Then He said to them: My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch” (Mk 14:33,34).

From day one Jesus knew that He had come to die. He knew from the beginning that He would be crucified. But when the hour approached, He got “deeply distressed.” The fear of death is more horrifying than death itself. It’s easy to talk about death when death is not at our doorstep. God knows that the fear of death torments humankind all their lifetime. The incarnation of Jesus was to potentially release us from the bondage of the fear of death (Heb 2:14,15).

Jesus handled the fear of death with two powerful weapons—

a) Prayer of Commitment

When fear of death gripped the Lord, He offered a prayer of commitment that is unparalleled in history. He said, “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will” (Mt 26:39). The fact that He repeated the same prayer thrice speaks of His dead earnestness. The Father God was so pleased with the prayer of His Son that He sent a special angel from Heaven and strengthened Him (Lk 22: 42-45). His feeble hands, fainting knees and faltering feet received strength to stand up and face whatever (Heb 12:12). He told His disciples, “Rise, let us be going!” (Mt 26:46).

The visitation of angels may not always be for the opening of prison doors. The appearance of the angel in the Garden of Gethsamane was not to deliver the Son of God from the soldiers but to enable Him to endure the hour of horror (Jn 12:27). Even after the angel strengthened Jesus, the agony was still there! The angel was ministering to Him but He was sweating blood! (Lk 22:43,44). This is God’s power manifesting in our suffering. More often than we think, the answer to prayer is power for endurance rather than power for deliverance.

Another truth to be learnt here is that the responsibility to pray is primarily on the sufferer. "Is anyone among you suffering? Let HIM pray" (Js 5:13a). Don't depend on Pastor Peter or Evangelist James or Prophet John to do the praying for you. One will go to sleep, the other will slumber and the next will be snoring! They have enough of their own sorrows to sink them! (Lk 22:45). In fact Jesus never asked His disciples in the Garden to pray for "Him," but only for "them" so they might not yield to temptation. He simply longed for their company and moral support when He said, "Stay here and watch with Me" (Mt 26:38; Mk 14:34). Others can support us in prayer but not substitute our praying. No one can understand the pain like the suffering candidate.

b) Hope of Resurrection

Death shows no partiality whether you are sweet sixteen or sane sixty. But Good Friday is not the end. There is an Easter Sunday! It was the hope of resurrection that toughened the faith of Christ during suffering and crucifixion. He endured the Cross in anticipation of the joyous resurrection. He despised the shame in the hope of glorification (Heb 12:2). He was disappointed by the hostility from sinners but He was not discouraged (v 3). The

throne of tomorrow inspired Him to endure the thorn of today! Whenever Jesus spoke of His death, He invariably talked about His resurrection also. See for example Mark 9:30,31 and 10:32-34.

I believe that whenever Jesus was tormented by the fear of death, He would have reminded Himself of Psalm 16:9-11, "You will not leave My soul in Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption... You will make Me full of joy in Your presence."

The faith heroes of yesteryears refused immediate deliverance because their eyes were on the ultimate resurrection (Heb 11:35). Apostle Paul graphically explained his non-stop suffering as "hourly danger" and "daily death" (1 Cor 15:30,31). He actually boasted of such a life because of his hope of resurrection. He challenged, "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" (v 55). He ended up with praise, "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (v 57). For no other experience of our lives can we witness God's power so much as for suffering.

2. Wounds from Friends

We have one of the most striking prophetic statements about the suffer-

ings of Christ in Zechariah 13:6, “Someone will say to him: What are these wounds in your hands? Then he will answer: Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.”

There’s nothing more hurting than being hurt by friends. Who betrayed Jesus? His Finance Secretary. Who disowned and cursed Him? His Chief Secretary. Who deserted Him? His Deputy Secretaries.

King David’s life experiences in history had a prophetic reflection in the life of the Son of David. King David mourned, “It is not an enemy who reproaches me; then I could bear it. Nor is it one who hates me who has magnified himself against me; then I could hide from him. But it was you, a man my equal, my companion and my acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in the throng... Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has acted as a traitor” (Psa 55:12-14; 41:9). Those who rose against David were his close friends, family folks and fellowship members. The lot of Jesus was the same. Can we expect anything better?

Jesus handled the hurts from friends by confidence in God and love towards them.

a) Confidence of Security

It is the feeling of insecurity that throws us off gear when we are disappointed by those whom we trust most. Whatever people spoke or did against Jesus never shook Him because His security was anchored in His Father.

The devil literally entered the heart of Judas and enticed him to betray his Lord. It was no ordinary thing. For Jesus it was more than a sword piercing through His heart. But He was not agitated. He stayed calm because He KNEW that “the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God” (Jn 13:2,3). No doubt Judas was about to hand Him over to the executors. But the pain of this betrayal was overcome by the knowledge and confidence that all things had already been given into His hands by His Daddy in Heaven. Everyone thought that the soldiers were taking Jesus to Golgotha. But Jesus knew that He was actually going to God! What a difference confidence in God makes on the face of betrayal and denial!

Friends or family folks or foes cannot snatch from us what the Heavenly Father has given us. Anyone can steal your purse but not your power! Anyone can stop your

promotion in your career but no one can shake your position in Christ! Robbery belongs to earth but we are enriched in the heavenlies! (Eph 1:3; Mt 6:20). People may forsake you but God never! (Heb 13:5b). "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom 8:31). "So we may boldly say: The Lord is my Helper... What can man do to me?" (Heb 13:6).

b) Service of Love

When those whom we trust most ditch or desert us, we get terribly upset. We will be tempted to abuse them and avoid them. Jesus must have had the same temptation because the Scriptures tell us that He was tempted like us in all areas. He overcame this temptation by continuing to serve His disciples and shower love on them more than ever. Here's John's record: "When Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end... He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded" (Jn 13:1-5).

Apostle Paul captures the significance of Christ's act of love for His disciples in spite of their failures when he writes, "The Lord Jesus ON THE SAME NIGHT IN

WHICH HE WAS BETRAYED took bread and..." (1 Cor 11:23). Jesus included the betrayer also for the supper! We are not to love people "because of" their goodness, but "in spite of" their badness and weakness. Otherwise there won't be a single person left in all the world whom we can love!

Washing of feet was indicative of forgiveness, cleansing and fellowship (Jn 13:8-10). Jesus cleansed His disciples in advance for the sins they would commit that night and after! He knew how Peter's faith would be shaken up. He encouraged him saying, "But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brothers" (Lk 22:31,32). The prayer of Jesus for Peter was more than answered. Look at Peter's Epistles, especially the first one. In each of its five chapters he encouraged and strengthened believers who had been going through fiery trials and suffering (1 Pet 1:5,6; 2:21; 3:9; 4:12,13; 5:9). This Epistle ministers to each of us today. When suffering is handled in God's way, the outcome will be glorious and results far reaching.

3. Misunderstanding and Injustice

Jesus was falsely accused. He was not given a fair judgement. Justice was denied

to Him. He was grossly misunderstood. When He said, "Destory this temple, and in three days I will raise it up," the Jews thought He was talking about the building of brick and mortar, whereas He was referring to His body of flesh and blood (Jn 2:19-21). While setting higher standards than the teaching of the Law of Moses, Jesus had to clarify, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill" (Mt 5:17). Concerning payment of taxes, in no uncertain terms He had taught the people, "Give to Caesar the things which are Caesar's and to God the things which are God's" (Lk 20:21-25). But before Governor Pilate the people accused Him, saying, "We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a King" (23:1,2).

Even the close disciples of Christ misunderstood many of His statements eventhough He talked to them plainly and like a friend. When He warned them about the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees, they started discussing among themselves whether Jesus said so because they had not taken bread with them (Mt 16:6,7). When Jesus rebuked Peter why he should bother about John even if in His will he would be alive till His second

coming, talk went around among the disciples that John would not die then! (Jn 21:21-23).

Jesus was perfect in His words. No one could have spoken better. If He Himself was so misunderstood in His day, how do we expect that we can escape the cross of misunderstanding? How often we have to plead with our family members and colleagues that we didn't mean what they had understood! Can the lot of dry wood be any better than that of the Green Tree?

How Jesus handled misunderstanding and injustice gives us atleast three valuable lessons to experience divine power in suffering—

a) "God is on the Throne!"

"You may misunderstand Me, but My Father in Heaven knows My heart. You may mistreat Me, but My Father in Heaven will vindicate Me. You may be sitting on the Prime Minister's chair or the President's chair, but the one seated on the throne in Heaven is My Father." This was the mental response of Jesus to misunderstanding and mistreatment. Look at the answers He gave to Pilate and the Priests—

John 19:10,11, “Pilate said to Him: Do You not know that I have authority to crucify You, and authority to release You? Jesus answered : You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from **above!**”

Luke 22:66-70, “If You are the Christ, tell us. But He said to them: If I tell you, you will by no means believe... Hereafter the Son of Man will sit on the **right hand** of the **power** of God.”

“Power belongs to God” (Psa 62:11). The earlier we learn this truth, the better for us lest we lose our virtues on the face of verbal abuse and assaults.

b) *“Silence is gold!”*

There are times when silence is more powerful than words. Silence is not because we don't know what to say but it is unspoken confidence and assurance. When the Priest asked Jesus, “Do You answer nothing?”, Jesus kept silent (Mt 26:62,63). When Pilate asked Him, “Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?”, Jesus answered him “not one word,” so that the governor marvelled greatly (Mt 27:13,14).

Why did Jesus stay silent and spoke nothing? Apostle Peter comments on it.

1 Peter 2:23, “When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly.” If we know that the battle is the Lord's, we will simply stand still and watch how He delivers us and brings us out as more than conquerors.

c) *“The Scripture must be fulfilled!”*

What God has told us in the light, we must not doubt in the dark. From His childhood Jesus preoccupied Himself with the study of the Scriptures. Through the Holy Spirit He had understood all that had been written about Him in the Holy Writ. He took consistent and conscious effort to live in perfect alignment with the Word of God. As the Word of God incarnate, He lived with the constant realisation of His awesome responsibility to have the Word of God fulfilled in His life — in thought, in word, and in deed. This is overwhelmingly seen during His suffering. See what He said to Peter when the latter cut off the ear of the High Priest's servant—

“Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide

Me with more than twelve legions of angels? How THEN COULD THE SCRIPTURE BE FULFILLED, that it must happen thus?" (Mt 26:52-56).

Jesus didn't even offer an excited prayer at the crucial hour. He was perfectly relaxed because He saw before His eyes the fulfilment of the Scriptures. Saturating ourselves with the Scriptures is the most effective way of equipping ourselves to handle suffering.

4. Physical Pain

There's one prayer I make so often in my life: "Lord, I am ready to die anytime; but I'm scared of physical pain. My tolerance level is too low." I believe God will answer my prayer!

Crucifixion was no ordinary punishment. The pain was unbearable. Jesus was not simply "wounded" but He was "crushed." That's how Prophet Isaiah portrays the suffering of Jesus in prophecy (Isa 53:5,10). Let's see how Jesus handled physical pain—

a) Mental Preparation

Besides a general knowledge that He would suffer and die, Jesus was also

mentally prepared for the kind of torture He would go through. The Father God sent Moses and Elijah to talk to His Son how He would suffer. Mark and Luke have recorded this information about the Heavenly visitors. "Jesus took Peter, John and James and went up on the mountain to pray... then behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of His death which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem" (Lk 9:28-31).

Why of all the Old Testament prophets did God choose to send Moses and Elijah to talk to His Son? Both these men suffered immensely in their times. Moses was rejected by the people and slandered against by his associates. Elijah was threatened by a woman and he pleaded death. I'm sure these two men primarily encouraged Jesus. When folks come to us to share their problems, let's not take it lightly. It may be God's way of preparing us for a similar situation. Saints and sinners suffer alike. Who can deny this? Don't miss God's message everytime you see suffering or hear of it.

b) Honest Confession

Jesus cried out His feelings of pain to His Father: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

Beware of the popular teaching of the day that you should not confess your pain. “Positive” confession is a psychological principle. The Biblical prescription is “true” confession. Philippians 4:8 is the all time favourite of the proponents of positive confession. But the very first item in this prescription list is, “Whatever things are TRUE...” Be real. Be truthful.

Paul never concealed or denied the physical weakness he had — “a thorn in the flesh” (2 Cor 12:7). He openly declared that it was a messenger of Satan to beat him. He cried out to God for help. The answer came though not as he expected. He was not healed but enabled to suffer.

Ask whatever help you need for your body that suffers. Jesus asked for water. Seek medical help and submit yourself into the hands of God.

5. Self-sympathy

Jesus had every reason to sympathise for Himself with questions like—

“Do I deserve this? Didn’t I obey My Father in everything? Didn’t I do only good to people? I forgave sinners. I healed the sick. I fed the hungry. I encouraged the downhearted. Why oh why should I suffer like this?”

Jesus overcame self-sympathy by empathising with the problems of others. There are three outstanding examples—

a) The women of Jerusalem

As Jesus was carrying the Cross on the dusty roads of Jerusalem, women mourned and lamented over Him. But Jesus turning to them said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children” (Lk 23:27-31). Jesus realised that He was going to Heaven to enjoy glorious days whereas those women and their children had more difficult days ahead. The thought of their future suffering made Jesus lift His eyes off His present suffering.

b) The thief on the cross

One of the two criminals rebuked the other saying, “Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong” (Lk 23:39-41). A statement like this could have dumped Jesus in self-sympathy. Here again Jesus turned His eyes towards the desperateness of the thief. True the thief was being punished justly, but Jesus respected his last minute realisation and

request. "I'm going to Paradise. Come along with Me!"

c) The women by the Cross

There were three Marys standing near the Cross—Mummy Mary, Aunty Mary and Magdalene Mary (Jn 19:25). Their tear-filled eyes could have driven Jesus to self-sympathy. Instead of giving place to it, Jesus began to think about His mother's need. He gave Mary as a mother to John, and John as a son to Mary. There was an adoption ceremony near the Cross! "My Father is getting back His Son. But mummy, you are losing a son. Take John for Me!"

The suffering of others is greater than ours. The day when this truth dawns on us is the day when we will learn how to handle suffering. It was when Job prayed for his friends that God restored his losses (Job 42:10).

Strong when weak!

Suffering is suffering, but it is while suffering we can experience God's power in a measure greater than ever. That's why apostle Paul boasted of his suffering rather than he bemoaned them. He testi-

fied, "The Lord said to me: My grace is sufficient for you, because My strength is made perfect in weakness. Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my weaknesses, that the POWER of Christ may rest on me... For when I am WEAK, then I am STRONG!" (2 Cor 12:9,10). Reflecting on how Jesus handled suffering, Paul comments, "Though He was crucified in WEAKNESS, yet He lives by the POWER of God" (2 Cor 13:4). And he adds, "We also are WEAK in Him, but we shall live with Him by the POWER of God!" Let's shout, Amen!

Power of Second Coming

THE manifestation of God's power during the first advent of Christ was unparalleled. His virgin birth was possible because "the power of the Highest" overshadowed His mother (Lk 1:35). The truth that nothing is impossible for God was stated for the first time in the New Testament in this context (v 37). The earthly ministry of Christ was literally a power explosion. God the Father anointed Jesus not only with the Holy Spirit but also with "power" (Acts 10:38). Demons trembled before Him. Diseases disappeared at His Word. Death loosened its grip when He called the dead back to life. Difficulties though mountainlike melted before Him. Darkness exited from the hearts of His hearers. Deep seas obeyed His Command instantly. The witnesses of His acts of power exclaimed, "We have seen strange things!" (Lk 5:26b).

Even during the trial and torturous death of the Son of God, the power of God was mighty in manifestation. When Jesus told the soldiers in the Garden of Gethsemane that He was the one they had come to arrest, they all fell back to the ground! (Jn 18:6). When He breathed His last on the Cross, the veil of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom, the earth quaked, the rocks were split, and many graves were opened! (Mt 27:50-52).

The resurrection of Christ was another mighty manifestation of God's power. To know and experience the power of Christ's resurrection was the deepest longing of apostle Paul (Phil 3:10). With the understanding of the prophecies of the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament, Paul concluded, "Christ (Himself) is the Power of God!" (1 Cor 1:24).

In the first advent, Jesus came in flesh and blood, emptying Himself of His heavenly status and glory. When He comes the second time, He will appear with all power and majesty! If the first advent had been characterised with so much of power, how much more will it be in the Second Coming! In God's economy, the glory of the latter shall always surpass the former! (Hagg 2:9). The best is yet to be!

We shall study how and where the power of God will be manifested in the Second Coming of Christ.

1. Redemption of our bodies

There was no sickness before sin entered the world. Eventhough sin is not the direct cause of every sickness today, if man had not sinned he would have never become sick. That's why alongwith our sins Christ bore our sicknesses also on His body. The Bible says that His blood cleanses us (1 Jn 1:7), and His wounds heal us (1 Pet 2:24). However, a question arises here. If Christ has borne my sins, why do I still have to struggle with sin, having believed on Him? (1 Jn 1:9). If He has borne my sicknesses, why do I still have to suffer from sicknesses? (1 Tim 5:23). No one except Paul among the Biblical authors seems to have given a satisfactory answer. He was a senior theologian but not simply a theoretician. He painstakingly dug into the Scriptures for puzzling questions of life, and patiently depended on God with supplications for pertinent revelations. Here's what he found out—

“We know that the entire creation groans and labours with birth pangs together until now. And not only they, but we also

who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body” (Rom 8:22,23).

On the Cross, Jesus did finish the work. He paid fully the penalty for our sin. He purchased for us all that mankind had lost because of transgression. But the total realisation of the benefits of Calvary in our lives has not come “until now.” We are enjoying the “firstfruits” only. We are still “groaning.” The perfect and permanent healing of our bodies is still awaited. We will receive it only at the Second Coming of Christ. The body we now have is earthly and mortal. Life in this body is a journey from birth to death. Just like the resurrected Christ we will be given a glorious body at His coming. If we would be alive when He returns, we will be transformed. If dead, we will be resurrected. It will be a demonstration of power. Apostle Paul prophesied the events sequentially in his first letter to the Corinthian Church—

“Let me tell you a wonderful secret God has revealed to us: Not all of us will die, but will all be transformed. It will happen in a moment, in the blinking of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, the dead

will be raised with transformed bodies. And then we who are living will be transformed so that we will never die. For our perishable earthly bodies must be transformed into heavenly bodies that will never die" (1 Cor 15:51-53).

Think of a country where no citizen has any disease, deformity or defect! No invention or power on earth can accomplish this. The power of God will bring it to pass at the Second Coming of His Son. "No more death... nor sorrow... nor crying... nor pain!" (Rev 21:4). Hallelujah! C. S. Lewis (1898-1963) the great Christian thinker put it this way: "If we were to see our glorified selves coming down the street, we would be tempted to fall at our own feet and worship ourselves!"

Those who have organized or attended international conferences know what amount of time, money and energy needs to be spent to bring delegates from all across the globe. Imagine what it would take to collect all the believers in Christ in one place! God's power will do it! Jesus explained the event thus: "As the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be... All the nations of the earth will see Him arrive on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And

He will send forth His angels with the sound of a mighty trumpet blast, and they will gather together His chosen ones from the farthest ends of the earth and heaven!" (Mt 24:27,30,31).

2. Perfection of saints

Sanctification has to be understood in three stages. The first stage is a crisis experience, the second one is a process, and the final one is again a crisis. We go through the first stage of sanctification at the time of justification. It happens when a sinner turns to God and believes in the finished work of Christ on the Cross. He is instantly cleansed. His rags of self-righteousness are replaced by robes of salvation. In the sight of God he is no more a sinner but a saint, accepted fully in the Beloved. The believer is made as clean as freshly fallen snow, and as white as wool (Isa 1:18). This is called "positional" sanctification. This is based on the believer's "standing" before God.

From the point of justification starts the process of "practical" sanctification. God made the believer a saint at the time of justification, and now God calls him to behave like a saint. The saint is to walk saintly. "Let the one who is holy, continue in holiness" (Rev 22:11). Positional sanctification is a privilege, whereas prac-

tical or progressive sanctification is a responsibility on the part of the believer. This is his “state” before God.

During the process of practical sanctification, we keep growing in holiness. We go from holiness to holiness. “The way of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, which shines ever brighter until the full light of day” (Prov 4:18). We reach the climax of sanctification at the return of the Son of God when the Sun of Righteousness will shine from the zenith! The final work of sanctification is exclusively by the power of God. The Scriptures elucidates this truth abundantly—

Having exhorted the believers to keep themselves away from every kind of evil, Apostle Paul encouraged them by telling what God would do for them at the return of Christ: “May the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until that day when our Lord Jesus Christ comes again” (1 Thess 5:22,23). He added, “God who has called you is faithful; He will do this” (v 24). In other words, God who has called us to holiness will accomplish it fully in us! God who has begun the good work of sanctification in us will continue His work until it is completed on that day when Christ comes back (Phil 1:6).

Several forces and powers may be working against us, discouraging us in our endeavour to walk holy before God. But if God is for us, who can be against us? “Whom God foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son... whom He predestined, them He also called; whom He called, them He also glorified!” (Rom 8:29,30,31,38). O to think that one day I will be exactly like Jesus! See how John was excited about this truth: “Dear friends, we are already God’s children, and we can’t even imagine what we will be like when Christ returns. But we do know that when He comes we will be like Him, for we will see Him as He really is” (1 Jn 3:2).

The perfecting work of the Lord at His coming will be both for individual believers and the Church as a whole. The Church is the Bride of Christ. He wants her to be perfect in the beauty of holiness. He keeps cleansing her by His blood and His word in order that He may “present her to Himself as a glorious Church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish” (Eph 5:26,27). The Church that is, is not the Church that was, or the Church that should be! Looking at the Church as it is today, we are depressed and we turn pessimistic. But let’s believe on the promises of God which are as sure as

God Himself! The Church is going to experience at the coming of Christ a power greater than what she received at Pentecost!

Holiness has two sides. One is walking blamelessly before God. The other is maintaining genuine love in our relationships with men. One is not complete without the other (1 Jn 4:20b). Progressive holiness means growing in both. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews blends these two aspects beautifully: "Try to live in peace with everyone, and seek to live a clean and holy life, for those who are not holy will not see the Lord" (Heb 12:14). Many of us fail miserably in our interpersonal relationships in spite of sincere efforts. We need not give up. Here's a specific promise in connection with the Second Coming: "May the Lord make your love grow and overflow to each other and to everyone else... As a result, Christ will make your hearts strong, blameless, and holy when you stand before God our Father on that day when our Lord Jesus comes with all those who belong to Him" (1 Thess 3:12,13).

3. Evangelisation of the world

At the Mount of Olives the disciples of Jesus asked Him, "What will be the sign

of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Mt 24:3). He listed a number of endtime signs and then concluded, "The Good News about the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, so that all nations will hear it; and then, finally, the end will come" (v 14).

While Peter was defending the strange experiences of the disciples when the Holy Spirit descended on them, he quoted from Prophet Joel, "In the last days, God said, I will pour out My Spirit upon all people... and I will cause wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below... before that great and glorious day of the Lord arrives. And anyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved" (Acts 2:17-21). The endtime harvest which began at the coming of the Holy Spirit will have its final phase just around the Second Coming of Christ.

The Devil is more furious than ever because he knows that he has little time (Rev 12:12). He stirs up all the powers of hell to work against soulwinners and evangelists. He instigates rulers to persecute missionaries. Persecution has always been there, but it will be intensified towards the end (Mt 24:9,10). The promises of Christ to the Church in Smyrna and the one in Philadelphia are for all missionary-

minded Christians to claim. “Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer... I have opened a door for you that no one can shut... Look, I am coming quickly!” (Rev 2:10a; 3:8a, 11a). A missionary evangelistic revival is widespread all over the world. Church growth has never been so rapid in all these twenty centuries. The Lord of the Harvest is recruiting workers even at five in the evening because the harvest is still plenty (Mt 20:6,7). If Pentecost is compared to former rain, we will have the latter rain now, just before the return of Christ so that every field becomes a lush pasture (Zech 10:1). The Holy Spirit will manifest His power in an unusual manner at this last hour.

The primary motivating factor in the life of Paul for evangelism was the Return of Christ. He loved souls because he loved the appearing of the Saviour. He desired his son Timothy to imbibe the same spirit. When he reminded Timothy of the Great Commission, he oftentimes referred to the Second Coming. See for example, 1 Timothy 6:12-15 and 2 Timothy 4:1,2. Eventhough the Great Tribulation has not yet come, the troubles faced by nations of the world are already great! The future is bleak. Leaders are baffled. The Church of Christ alone has a valid reason to lift up its head in optimism.

Nations are boasting empty of their past glory, but the Church can boast expectantly of its future glory! The main reason is that the earth is going to be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea!

The State of Bihar in India was once called the graveyard of missionaries. No more so! It's now the vineyard of missions! Over 75000 souls are added to the Church worldwide everyday. In China, the Church membership is growing by an average of 30,000 everyday. The African continent which was 3% Christian in 1900 is over 45% today. In AD 100 the ratio of Christians Vs. non-Christians was 1:360. Now it is 1:6. All these are not accidental. Evangelisation of the world is getting accelerated as we get closer to the Second Coming. The Church endued with the spirit and power of Elijah is calling and compelling men and women to come back to God lest God's anger comes on them (Mal 4:5,6).

4. Eradication of evil

John the Baptist as the forerunner of Jesus Christ introduced Him as the one who will burn the chaff with never-ending fire (Mt 3:12c). In His life Jesus did not stop with loving what was right. He also hated what was wrong (Heb 1:9a). With

the power of the Holy Spirit He went about doing “good” and delivering folks from (d)evil (Acts 10:38). But during His ministry He did not eradicate all evil from the world. He repeatedly acknowledged that Satan was the prince of this wicked world system (Jn 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Even after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, apostle John observed, “The world around us is under the power and control of the evil one” (1 Jn 5:19b). The Second Coming of Christ will ring the death bell for evil.

The Lord Jesus will consume Antichrist with the breath of His mouth, and destroy him by the splendour of His coming (2 Thess 2:8). At His return He will deal not only with Satan but also with his followers. “The Lord Jesus will come with His mighty angels, in flaming fire, bringing judgement on those... who refuse to obey the Gospel. They will be punished with everlasting destruction” (2 Thess 1:7-9). Anyone who has not kissed the feet of the Son of God will be consumed by His fury (Psa 2:12).

Satan will be bound for a thousand years and thrown into the bottomless pit so he will not be able to deceive nations (Rev 20:1-3). Finally he will be thrown into the lake of fire prepared for him and his angels. They will be tormented day

and night forever and ever (Rev 20:10). Think of a land where Satan will not be! Even in the Garden of Eden he could play havoc. There’s no country without corruption. No system of government is fool-proof. The power and authority of the King of kings and the Lord of lords can alone establish a system, free of all evil, where righteousness alone dwells!

Demonic spirits will inspire the rulers of the world to gather and fight against God. This is called the battle of Armageddon (Rev 16:14-16). “Together they will wage war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will defeat them because He is Lord over all lords and King over all kings” (Rev 17:14). The evil and ungodly system of the world, called Babylon, will be fallen, and fallen for ever! (Rev 18:2). There will be a shout from Heaven, “Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honour and power to the Lord our God! His judgements are just and true” (Rev 19:1,2).

Today I become proud when I am preferred, and envious when another is exalted. When Christ comes back and distributes His rewards, the recipient will not become proud and the onlookers will not become jealous! Heaven will be a place of surprises. The first will be last, and the last will be first (Lk 13:30). Many whom I expect to be there may be missing,

and many whom I had written off here would be merrymaking there (Mt 21:31). No surprise will make us unpleasant, because there would be no presence of sin! What a place!

In order to establish the New Heaven and the New Earth, God will set the heavens on fire and the elements will melt away in the flames (2 Pet 3:12). We will then understand the meaning of the statement, "Our God is a consuming fire!" (Heb 12:29).

5. Celebration in Heaven

We now come to the final scene in the story of God's omnipotence. Here's a piece from John's narrative of his vision: "Then I heard what sounded like the shout of a huge crowd, or the roar of mighty ocean waves, or the crash of loud thunder: Hallelujah! For the Lord God OMNIPOTENT reigns!" (Rev 19:6). This is a call for celebration. "Let us be glad and rejoice and honour Him. For the time has come for the wedding feast of the Lamb, and His bride has prepared herself" (v 7).

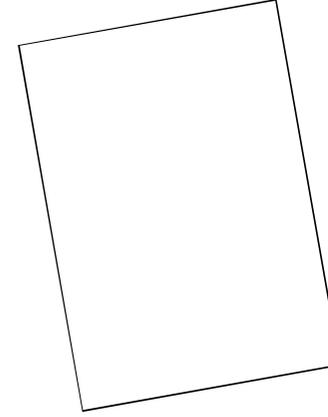
This end-of-the-age celebration had been anticipated thousands of years ago. Isaiah prophesied, "On this mountain the Lord Almighty will spread a wonderful feast for everyone around the world. It will be

a delicious feast of good food... He will swallow up death forever! The Sovereign will wipe away all tears... In that day the people will proclaim, This is our God; we waited for Him, and He saved us!" (Isa 25:6-9).

Today we as believers in Christ are seated with Him in the heavenly places, in the "spiritual" sense (Eph 2:6). But in the ages to come God will show us "literally" the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards us in Christ Jesus (v 7). "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Cor 2:9). True the Holy Spirit has revealed some of these things to us today (v 10). But when we will literally join the celebration, we will exclaim, "Not even half of this was told us!" That's why Paul in the midst of his writing to the Ephesian Christians broke out into rapturous worship and said, "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power which works in us, to Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus forever and ever through endless ages!" (Eph 3:20,21).

Do you still wonder why the Book of books ends with the prayer, "Come, Lord Jesus!"?

**A New Book by the Author
for Daily Reading...**



*432 Pages 23 cm x 16 cm x 2 cm
Quality Paper, Attractive Wrapper, Plastic Cover*

*Price Rs. 150/-
Forwarding Charges Rs. 25/-*

(Available in Hindi, Kannada, Oriya and Tamil also)

*An ideal Gift for Birthdays, Weddings, Anniversaries,
Graduation and the New Year!*

You can start reading this from any part of the year!

*Available from
Blessing Literature Centre
21/11 West Coovam River Road
Chintadripet, Chennai 600002, India
Tel: 044-28450411
<bymliterature@vsnl.net>*

Visit...

StanleyOnBible.com

A WEBSITE FOR BIBLE LOVERS

CONTENTS

p ***My Letters***

Stanley talks heart to heart
with the Visitors of this Website.

p ***General Messages***

Enlightening Articles for Christian Growth

p ***Sermon Outlines***

Outlines on miscellaneous subjects for
Personal Meditation and Pulpit Preaching

p ***Bible Studies***

Studies on specific themes
and select books of the Bible

p ***Doctrinal Essays***

Corrective Teaching to uphold
Sound Doctrines of the Bible

p ***Youth Matters***

Practical Guidelines to Young Men
and Young Women for Successful Living

p ***Leaders Column***

Biblical Insights and Practical Lessons
on Christian Leadership

p ***Missionary Challenge***

Calling Christians to obey
the Great Commission of Christ

p ***My Answers***

Answers to Questions
frequently asked but rarely answered

p ***Quotable Quotes***

Stanley's analytical Statements
about Christian Life and Ministry

Other titles by the author—

- r *Apples of Gold*
- r *Balanced Christian, The*
- r *Better Everyday (Daily Devotional)*
- r *Blessed are the Obedient!*
- r *Dare to be Different!*
- r *Enlightening Essays*
- r *Faith Life*
- r *Fire in My Bones*
- r *Five Loaves & Two Fish*
- r *Frank Answers (Volume One)*
- r *Frank Answers (Volume Two)*
- r *Happy Harvest*
- r *Higher Ways Higher Thoughts*
- r *How to be Anointed with the Spirit*
- r *How to be Saved*
- r *Inspired Insights*
- r *Little Foxes*
- r *Open Heaven*
- r *Open Heaven*
- r *Patience makes the Man!*
- r *Preachers & People*
- r *To Dear Students...*
- r *Wild Honey*
- r *With God Again!*

These books are available
in several Indian vernaculars also.
The author's sermons in DVDs are also available with us.

**Blessing Youth Mission
Church Colony
Vellore 632 006, India**

Blessing Youth Mission

A transdenominational ministry dedicated to Revival and Evangelism, functioning since 1971.



Conducting Revival Camps,
Bible Studies and Training Programmes.



Establishing witnessing groups in schools
and colleges through Campus programmes.



Visiting villages, slums, hospitals, etc.,
through hundreds of outreach teams
of laymen and laywomen.



Church planting and Church revival ministries in
Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Chattishgarh, Delhi,
Gujarat, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya
Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan,
Tamilnadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal
through over 300 fulltime missionaries.



Publishing books, tracts and a periodical titled
BLESSING in Assamese, Bengali, English,
Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi,
Oriya, Tamil and Telugu.



Helping the poor, downtrodden
and neglected people through
medical, literacy and relief works.

Pray for this Mission.

Participate in its activities.

Support it with your offerings.



Blessing Youth Mission
Church Colony, Vellore 632 006, India
Tel: 0416-2242943, 2248943
<bym@sancharnet.in>
www.BlessingYouthMission.org