

The Lord is Building a Glorious Church

By

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"He shall bear the Glory"

Golden Text:

"And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,
"Take of them of the captivity, even of Heldai, of Tobijah, and of Jedaiah, which are come from Babylon, and come thou the same day, and go into the house of Josiah the son of Zephaniah;
"Then take silver and gold, and make crowns, and set them upon the head of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest;
"And speak unto him, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and He shall grow up out of His place, and He shall build the temple of the LORD:
"Even He shall build the temple of the LORD; and He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon His throne; and He shall be a priest upon His throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both" (Zech. 6:9-13).

The BRANCH, the Messianic King-Priest (Isa. 11:1; Jer. 23:5, 33:15), cannot afford to be sloppy about the project, the temple He's building. He intends to "bear the glory". The BRANCH will not be planted; He will sprout up from His place by His own power unaided by man. The BRANCH is divine. He will appear in this world not begat by a human father but conceived by the Holy Spirit, and He will set out to "build the temple of the LORD", the most glorious project the world has ever seen!

The "temple of the LORD" is a reference to the Church, and the builder, the BRANCH, is the Lord Jesus Christ. And the building is glorious. The very meaning of the term 'church' conveys the deliberate meticulous care that the builder has invested in this divine project of church building. The Greek word for 'church' is "ecclesia" and means 'called out ones'. The church is not a jumble of people cobbled together to form an organization. *Ecclesia* represents "a holy calling" of specific individuals, a selection of persons into a holy relationship with God (2 Tim 1:9).

The church is not a mere fraternity and certainly NOT the building or place of worship. It is not an organization of men or a social club or a place to meet new friends or perhaps a future

spouse. While it may involve elements of some of the above descriptions, none of them accurately fits the Biblical description of the Church. *The church is a spiritual organism.* The church is a living, breathing, growing, maturing organism, and its members are supposed to have the Christ nature, to manifest the Christ life and to bind together in one spirit and mind and purpose, all derived from the love of Christ and the doing of His will. The Church is "the body of Christ "of which He is the head. While all "called-out ones" make up the members or body parts, each has been positioned in the body as the Head deems fit (Col. 1:18; Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 15:27). There's order and discipline in the body of Christ.

The church is Jesus' pet project. After all, it's His own body (Eph. 1:21-22). He loves her to bits. "Her" because He looks on the church as His bride, His wife, the apple of His eye (2 Cor. 11:2; Rev. 19:8). In demonstration of His great love for the church, He gave her the most precious thing of all--His life--so that she might live with Him ever happily after in unimaginable glory. This is the church, and the Builder, Christ the Branch, is resolved to complete the building of it in glory once He has started it. He announced with an air of finality and triumph: "... upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18).

You are part of the church; you are the church, and the gates of hell--all the might of the evil one--cannot prevail against you. Because you are in the hands of the Branch, who is called Emmanuel (God with us), and He has founded you on the Rock, which is His very own limitless power. However, know that you are in contention with the devil and his evil kingdom, but be assured that you are on the winning side. The Lord cannot see you fail, cannot see you fail to reach the goal of the glory set before you. He intends to "bear the glory".

The Glory is in Himself

The situation is unlike what prevails in the world. The building is glorious and magnificent if only and only if the finest materials are used. With Christ, the story is different. The glory is in Himself, not in the building materials. Yet the building turns out impeccably beautiful and glorious.

So who constitute the building materials of Jesus' church project?

The materials are nothing to write home about. They are not polished stones nor marbles nor precious minerals, but crude unpolished stones which neither shine nor glitter. Their eventual glorious transformation is owed solely to the sterling craftsmanship of the Branch. It is just like how a master craftsman by sheer skill turns a crude raw material into a jewel of beauty: "Take away the dross from the silver," says Prov. 25:4, "and the smith has material for a vessel" (ESV).

Thus it happens that the "called out ones" of Christ are not drawn from the cream of society but mainly from the rabble, the lower social classes, as the apostle Paul points out in 1 Cor. 1:26. This is evidenced by the fact that only a few people considered "wise" by the world's standards have been called into the church (v. 26a). The same is true of the world's men of power and status; not many of them have been called (vv. 27-28). On a human level, choosing such low 'dumb fellows' does seem quite absurd, yet this is heaven's will, and there's a higher purpose for it. In Luke 10:21 the Lord Jesus rejoiced in spirit, "and said, I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; FOR SO IT SEEMED GOOD IN THY SIGHT".

The "good" God sees in His collection of misfits and social dregs is that it redounds to His greater glory; it's here that His ingenuity in creating something of surpassing value out of worthless things shines and His higher purpose revealed. In what way? He chooses what the world considers "foolish" to shame the "wise" and what it considers "weak" to shame the "strong". Again, He chooses what is low and despised by the world--indeed regarded as nothing--to write off what is of regard. In the end, God's selection of the foolish and the weak completely puts the world's greats in the shade for the still higher purpose of ensuring that no "flesh" (who pride themselves on their worldly pedigree, name and achievements) is able to boast in His presence (v. 29). Nobody would appropriate God's glory simply because people already regard them as 'great' in their own right. But overall, it is to drive home a point (which the apostle had been stressing all along): "... the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Cor. 1:25 *ESV*).

Thus for us, the called of God, *all our worth is in Christ* (v. 30). We have no inherent value in ourselves, no greatness in our own selves. It's Christ who wholly makes up for our inadequacies. Hence God has made Christ to be our "wisdom, righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (30b). So then, we come inherently worthless and naked to Christ, but He clothes us with His glory. We come to Him "foolish", and He makes wise; we come to Him as sinners, and He makes us righteous; we come to Him stained with sin, and He makes us holy; we come to Him as slaves of sin, and He redeems us--He buys us back from sin!

With all that God has accomplished for us through Christ, we have no basis for personal boast, no basis to glory in ourselves (v. 31). Ironically what the world's wise and mighty and noble people make themselves out to be is only pretended greatness. Despite their pretence, they are fundamentally no better than the so-called underclass. Like all other humans, they are not free from the fallen human condition of sin, death and sickness. They are knee-deep in the human quagmire, but their over-bloated ego has blinded them to the reality of their miserable existence without Christ.

We who have been called are the object of God's grace. We were not worthy of it, but God chose us by His grace. And He made us part of His glorious church. He alone is our PRIDE and our BOAST:

Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches:
But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD" (Jer. 9:23-24). Amen!

The Purpose is Grand

As every worthy project has a purpose, so the Lord Jesus has a purpose for the Church He is building. His primary purpose is "make ready a people prepared for God" (Luke 1:17), "a people for His name". At the Jerusalem Conference, the first and the ever recorded by the early church, presiding elder James drew attention to this purpose:

Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name.
And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written,
After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up:
That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom My name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things'.
Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world (Acts 15:14-18).

The selection of members of Jesus' church concurs with and is in fact described in terms of the rebuilding of David's tabernacle! Think of it—the tabernacle of David was in ruins until now. David's tabernacle suffered a spiritual tumble soon after he was succeeded by his son Solomon. Unlike his father David, Solomon did not wholly follow after God with all his heart but dabbled in idolatry. His many foreign wives turned his heart away from the true God and he began to serve other gods (1 Kings 11: 1-6).

Following Solomon's death, the kingdom went to his son Rehoboam. It was under his reign that the chickens came home to roost for all the sins of Solomon. God tore away ten tribes from the house of David by the hand of a man called Jeroboam who reigned over the breakaway ten tribes. From then on, the tabernacle of David was on a downhill. By the time of the reign of king Abijam, David's kingdom was a pale shadow of its former glory - a tottering kingdom kept in place by the LORD for solely David's sake (1 Kings 15:1-4).

Meanwhile, the LORD had sworn an everlasting oath to David that his throne would endure forever (Ps 89:3-4, 34-37; 2 Sam. 7:16). Yet Nebuchadnezzar's final onslaught on Jerusalem in

586 BC swept away David's throne and brought it to ruin just as uttered in prophecy in Ps 89-- the same Psalm of promise to David:

But Thou hast cast off and abhorred, Thou hast been wroth with Thine anointed.
Thou hast made void the covenant of Thy servant: Thou hast profaned his crown by casting it to the ground.
Thou hast broken down all his hedges; Thou hast brought his strong holds to ruin (Ps 89:38-40).

Was it a case of promise made, promise broken?

Not at all. The promise stood firm. God reaffirmed the promise through the prophet Jeremiah:

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.
In His days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is His name whereby He shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS (Jer. 23:5-6).

¹⁴ Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will perform that good thing which I have promised unto the house of Israel and to the house of Judah.

¹⁵ In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land.

¹⁶ In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely; and this is the name wherewith she shall be called, The LORD our righteousness.

¹⁷ For thus saith the LORD; David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel (Jer. 33:14-17).

The promised restoration of the tabernacle of David is the building of the church. That you are now a part of God's church shows God *foreknew* you and selected you beforehand from the beginning of the world to be His own. The church belongs to the Lord; God owns us as His own special people - chosen "in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love" (Eph. 1:4).

You are blessed to be part of God's grand purpose He's executing on earth. This purpose--this new tabernacle of David--will not fail like the first one. The "Righteous BRANCH", the king Messiah, Himself leads it never to fall again. You are safe and secure in Him--in His restored Davidic tabernacle. No war will end in your defeat; the devil and the enemy shall not triumph (Luke 1:69-75). David's "higher" Son, the Son of God, is in charge (Ps 89:27; Luke 1:32). He won't fail like Solomon or like any of his successor kings. He's "the Root of David"; He always prevails (Rev. 5:5).

He will bear the glory. And the glory will be greater. For He will not just reign over Israel; His tabernacle will extend to all the ends of the earth (Isa. 26:15). "In His name shall the Gentiles trust" (Matt. 12:21; Rom. 15:12).

Prior to the restoration of David's tabernacle, namely the church, the phenomenon of Gentiles trusting in the God and Messiah of Israel was a mystery between the Father God and His Son only; it was unknown to even the angelic principalities and powers in heaven until the actual founding of the Church which brought Gentile believers into the body of the Messiah.

As the apostle Paul put it, this mystery "was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; THAT THE GENTILES SHOULD BE FELLOWHEIRS, AND OF THE SAME BODY, AND PARTAKERS OF HIS PROMISE IN CHRIST BY THE GOSPEL: Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of His power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Him" (Eph. 3:3-11).

The purpose is grand, conceived in eternity in Christ, and the effect is grander still and awesomely glorious: Gentiles are not only "fellow heirs, and of the same body and partakers of His promise in Christ", but also the Messiah lives in them in His glory which anticipates an even greater glory of unimaginable proportions. Paul the apostle discusses this aspect of the mystery in Col. 1 which had similarly been hidden "from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is CHRIST IN YOU, THE HOPE OF GLORY" (vv. 26-27).

The purpose is infinitely grand. The Righteous Branch has not finished with you in His ongoing project of recreating you in His glorious image. The greater glory is to come; His Spirit in you is the deposit (2 Cor. 5:1-5)—THE HOPE OF GLORY! When He's done with you, you will be so gloriously transformed (1 Cor. 2:9; Col. 3:4; 1 John 3:2) that you cannot but agree that He deserves to bear the glory!

A Building of Variegated Stones

The glorious temple project is ongoing. The point has already been made about how the building blocks of God's church are mainly drawn from the lower social classes so that the power and glory of God will shine through them, instead of being obscured by their perceived worldly greatness were God to choose the elites of society.

But how and where does God pick His building blocks?

He chooses the members of His church from different ethnic groups, and backgrounds and nationalities and melds us all into one beautiful church. The idea is to foster spiritual unity among the members of His universal church and then bring us closer to heaven as a united body and heaven closer to us, the united Christian body.

Eph 2:11-22

¹¹ Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands;

¹² That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:

¹³ But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

¹⁴ For He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;

¹⁵ Having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace;

¹⁶ And that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:

¹⁷ And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.

¹⁸ For through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

¹⁹ Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;

²⁰ And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;

²¹ In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:

²² In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

The blood of Jesus has brought us near the house of Israel and ultimately God. The objection of circumcision, a physical badge of separation between Jew and Gentile, has been soundly overruled! Now all the spiritual riches of Israel belong to Gentile believers too--"the covenants of promise", Messiah and God, the God of Israel. Christ did not pick and choose whom to shed His blood for; He shed His blood for all (Matt. 20:28). In so doing, He treated all men equally, discriminated against none and did away with all notions of racial superiority. The blood He shed for all teaches peace and reconciliation between all categories of men. He eliminated all hostility between people, especially that between physical Israel and the Gentiles formalized in laws and decrees that enjoined separation between the two and concretized in a stone inscription in the Jerusalem temple that forbade Gentiles, on pain of death, from crossing over to the Court of Israel (e.g. Deut. 23:3; Acts 21:28-29). Christ, the Saviour of the world (John 4:42), aimed to reconcile all believers in Himself, making them *one spiritual corporate entity* and, in that state of unity and reconciliation, reconcile the undivided body of believers to God. The unity of believers is an absolute necessity because we must all go to the Father through Christ in the same Spirit.

The result is that we end up not as a church of citizens and second-class citizens, but as "fellow citizens with the [Jewish] saints, and of the household of God". A household "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit".

"He will bear the glory". Yet how can He, when His people are feuding and there's disunity and rancour?

The unifier is the blood. The blood that bought you is the same blood that bought your fellow believer, although he comes from the Savanna belt and you are from the coast or even racially and nationally separated by the seas. The blood of Christ has made us one family; it has brought all of us into the covenant family of Israel. Now God sees us ALL TOGETHER as His own special people, His chosen people who are a kingdom of priests to Him. He doesn't see black or white or yellow or brown; neither Akan nor Ewe. Because of Jesus' blood, we have all become *spiritual blood relations*. All ethnic barriers and prejudices have been broken by Christ through His shed blood.

As a member of God's church, it's time you actively pursued peace and reconciliation with your brother to give meaning to the reconciliation of Calvary in your life. Don't judge and discriminate on the basis of your brother's ethnicity based on long-held stereotypical beliefs about one tribe or another. In Ghana, and perhaps in all Africa, tribalism is very much alive, and it seems through conscious and subconscious socialization we are conditioned to look down on, or at least view with suspicion, persons from tribes other than our own. But this is what obtains in the world and among unbelievers who have not yet been "brought near" by the blood. In Christ, it's a new ball game! All believers are one--EQUAL--before God, and He's rich unto all (Rom. 10:12). The danger, however, lies not in the fact that it's simply against the culture in Christ to discriminate and divide; the danger is that unless you take steps to reconcile with your brother, don't hope to be reconciled with God. Jesus reconciles us as one undivided body of believers to God so we will become the household of God and fellow citizens with the saints, built on the foundation of the sound teachings of the apostles and prophets and, above all, Christ. It's only then that "all the building [parts are] fitly framed together " and grows into "a holy temple of God" in which God dwells by His Spirit!

So then, disunity and the perpetuation of discrimination weaken the building and drive away God's Spirit. Don't be the one to threaten the stability of God's building. Drop all prejudices and grudges and seek peace with your brother. If Jesus did not find a reason to exclude particular groups of people and individuals from the priceless gift of His precious blood but shed it for all, what excuse do you have to discriminate against another? What greater attribute do you have? What greater blessing?

The glory is not in us but in the blood which reconciles us to one another and then to the Father making us fit for His spiritual dwelling.

And woe betide us if He dwells not in us. He will not use us at all. For *He will not use dead stones* in the building of His temple but "living stones":

Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 2:5).

"Ye also". The "also" hints at an earlier reference to a similar kind: "To WHOM coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious" (1 Pet. 2:4).

The Builder is the great "Living Stone", and He won't use materials of doubtful quality in the building of His temple. In the long run, such materials will affect the overall quality of the building and bring shame instead of glory. He will use construction stones similar in nature to Himself--"living stones". As 'living stones', they are not inanimate or inactive but active. And active in the most honourable way--as "a holy priesthood" who "offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ".

In using us in the building of His church Christ has promoted us from nobodies to a position of honour and importance; He has shared His priestly honour with us. Just as He, our High Priest, offers spiritual sacrifices in the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 8:1-3), so is it also our duty to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God. As the New Testament spiritual priests of God, our "spiritual sacrifices" include the following:

- (1) The sacrifice of our body in holy living to God and service (Rom. 12:1-2)
- (2) The "sacrifice of praise" in giving thanks to God (Heb. 13:15).
- (3) The sacrifice of good works (Heb. 13:16).
- (4) And the sacrifice of our substance in support of God's work (Phil. 4:18).

Meanwhile, one priestly role that we could never abdicate is "the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18). As priests who mediate between God and men, it's our responsibility to reach out to the lost and perishing and to do so with compassion (Heb. 5:1-2). When we see young men lost to mind-bending drugs, young women leading loose lives, and men addicted to the bottle, we should be moved with compassion to seek their conversion and salvation. We must do all we can within our power - by word of mouth, by electronic media and publications - to reach the deceived and the unreached with the saving gospel of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

But how did we become "living stones" in the first place?

He imparted His life to us by His Spirit. That's how crucially important the Spirit is in our life, and why we must never let go of Him through disobedience and misdeeds. His Spirit in us is Life: "And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit [Christ in you] is life because of righteousness" (Rom. 8:10).

Refuse the Spirit, and you banish all notion of your being part of Christ's church. You - the believer- are the temple. It's His Spirit in you that makes you His temple together with all other believers in whom His Spirit also lives:

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?
If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are (1 Cor. 3:16-17).

The stones for the temple were picked from different places and backgrounds, but the Lord put them all together into one holy temple by His blood and Spirit. Yes, we are from different social, ethnic and even racial backgrounds, but in Christ we are one family. Made so by His blood, shed for all of us so that we would be one holy temple in the Lord in which we minister as His priests. This is how far Christ has brought us, and it's beautiful and glorious!

A Community of the Spirit-led

By now, it's obvious that Jesus plans to build a Spirit-filled church. In fact, it's by the baptism of the Spirit that He actually and formally puts His called-out ones into the church, which is His body:

For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13).

The Spirit is another unifier: the same Spirit in each and everyone binds one and all together, and in that state of unity we are 'baptized' -dipped - into one church body. Membership in Jesus' church is thus an act of the Spirit; without being indwelt by the Spirit leading to the production of definite character traits Christ seeks in the glorious church He is building, count yourself out. By putting the same Spirit in all members, Christ not only ensures uniformity of faith (Eph. 4:3-6) but also uniformity of character - the model character of Christ - whereby "Christ belongs to all, and is in all":

Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds;
And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created Him:
Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all (Col. 3:9-11).

The Spirit-filled individual is the one who has the character of God and thus is said to be the 'son of God' (John 1:12-13; Rom. 8:14; Heb. 12:10). Such is the individual Jesus accepts into His church.

And oh, how beautiful is the Spirit-filled church; how harmonious; how close-knit! Instead of individualism and the pursuit of selfish interests, the Spirit engenders camaraderie, which is "a feeling of friendship and cheerful support for one another within a group or team of people" (*21st Century Dictionary*). With this Spirit-inspired camaraderie, "schism" is done away with, giving way to cooperation and empathy in the body. Members then are not isolated individual parts but vital parts of one whole in which all the component parts (members) are in a symbiotic relationship with each other and none sees itself as an independent, self-existing unit in itself.

The apostle Paul brings out this underlying idea in an analogy in which he likens the parts of the human body and their individual functions to the members of the body of Christ (the church) and their divinely assigned individual roles. He explains:

I Cor. 12:14-27

¹⁴ For the body is not one member, but many.

¹⁵ If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

¹⁶ And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?

¹⁸ But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him.

¹⁹ And if they were all one member, where were the body?

²⁰ But now are they many members, yet but one body.

²¹ And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

²² Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary:

²³ And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness.

²⁴ For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked.

²⁵ That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.

²⁶ And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

²⁷ Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.

In the body, "the members should have the same care one for another". It's a "should" because mutual care and concern for one another is what should ideally prevail among a group of people who have the same Spirit which has given them a single uniform character! That's the expectation of the Spirit unless, of course, we don't have the Spirit of Christ in us. But we will definitely have the Spirit if we have truly repented and turned to the Lord. The Holy Spirit is a gift God gives almost as a matter of course to all truly converted persons (Acts 2:38).

The proof, of course, is in your spiritual and moral fruits which would include love and concern for your fellow member in the body of Christ. And it will be unforced. Just as the eyelid naturally bats to protect the eyeball from dust, etc, so you will spontaneously show concern for a brother in need if you truly share the same Spirit with him. Even if you cannot do much for him by way of practical help, your concern will be genuine and heartfelt. You will empathize with him and feel his pain as though you were in his shoes. And in a sense that would be true because you share the same Spirit, the same spiritual essence and personality.

So if your love has grown cold, the Spirit must be dwindling in you. Don't watch it peter out. Fan it into flames! The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy:

For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control (2 Tim. 1:6-7 ESV).

Similarly, he urged the church in Thessalonica: "Do not put out the Spirit's fire" (1 Thess. 5:19 ISV).

How? "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17); "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God" (Eph. 4:30).

Christ will not have a cold, loveless church of mean, lifeless fellows. He wants a Spirit-filled vibrant church brimming with love and unity. He will bear the glory!

A Household of Saints

A community of Spirit-led believers all of whom have the character of Christ can only be saints, a holy people of God. The church of the Messiah is a household of saints. And He has taken care to ensure just such a church. *The church is a community of saints by a three-tier process.*

The first tier is sanctification by the blood. When a sinner repents of his sins in response to the Gospel and runs to the Lord for salvation, He offers him what scripture calls 'redemption.' To the extent that to 'redeem' means to 'buy back', namely to 'buy back from sin', redemption can only be possible by His shed blood (Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 6:20). The apostle Paul describes the sorry state of the unredeemed sinner: "The Law is spiritual but I am carnal sold as a slave to sin" (Rom. 7:14).

Beloved, such was your miserable condition before Christ came into your life and 'redeemed' you from the bondage of sin. The sentence for sin handed down by a holy God, the Creator and Judge of all, was death. 'The day you shall eat of the tree of good and evil, you shall die" (Gen. 2:17), He warned our first parents, who went on to disobey Him and brought on themselves and their descendants the curse and sentence of death (Rom. 5:12).

As loving and merciful as our God is, however, He would not leave us to our fate. He sent His sinless Son to be the ransom and the propitiation for our sins so we will not perish but have everlasting life (Matt. 20:28; John 3:16; 1 John 4:10). That is to say, the Son bore the sentence of death on our behalf so that God's original plan for us to have everlasting life will be guaranteed. A simple matter for life for Life. *The life Adam carelessly threw away through disobedience has been fully atoned and paid for by Christ and thus restored.* The sentence no longer stands for the sinner who has accepted His substitutionary death (John 5:24; Gal. 3:13-14). He paid it all at no cost to us; it's absolutely free:

[We] ... are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, Whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in His divine forbearance He had passed over former sins. It was to show His righteousness at the present time, so that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Rom. 3:24-26 ESV).

The redemption is in the blood; the ransom is the blood, and it has turned away God's just wrath giving way to forgiveness of sins (Eph. 1:7). *Having forgiven us, God has turned the punishment into a gift--the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ, His Son (Rom. 6:23).* It's a promise He will fully redeem at His return (1 John 2:25).

At that time, we will see off death; we will be clothed with immortality. However, the everlasting life received through Jesus does not only consist of immortality but also of holiness. So then the shed blood of Christ not only buys us back but also makes us holy. In fact, it redeems us from both the death sentence and the life of disobedience which brought on the death penalty in the first place. This latter aspect is what the apostle Peter stresses in 1 Pet. 1:17-19:

Also, if you are addressing as Father the One who judges impartially according to each person's actions, you should live out your temporary stay on earth in fear. 18 You should be aware that the ransom paid to free you from the worthless way of life which your fathers passed on to you did not consist of anything perishable like silver or gold; 19 on the contrary, it was the costly bloody sacrificial death of the Messiah, as of a lamb without defect or spot (*The Complete Jewish Bible*).

Holiness is a product of redemption. Not only does the incomparable preciousness of the ransom enjoin us to start living a holy life (1 Cor. 6:20; 2 Cor. 5:14-15), it also does actually cleanse us from all unrighteousness allowing us a fresh start with God:

1 John 1:6-7

If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.

A holy life is the outcome. And the holiness pervades our whole being, penetrating deep into our psyche:

Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.

For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh:

How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Heb. 9:12-14).

We have no excuse to remain unholy members of Christ's church. It's incongruous, to say the least. The preciousness of Jesus' holy blood lays on us a moral responsibility to live a holy life, unless, of course, we count it a thing of contempt, a sin which deserves the severest divine punishment (Heb. 10:29)!

What is more, the blood effectively cleanses us of all kinds of sin to the extent of "purging our conscience from dead works"! Our conscience is clear; that judgmental 'still small voice' within us bears witness that we are not sinning and we have no secret sins. An examination of our own souls reveals not the retention or guilt of sin. We are absolutely free from sin by the blood of Jesus, "the Lamb of God who TAKES AWAY the sin of the world" (1 John 1:29).

Christ so loved His church that He would stop at nothing to make His glorious church truly holy. Thus in addition to His blood, He also designed His word to make and keep us holy. A continuous process (provided we continue to obey it), sanctification by the word serves to preserve us in the holiness attained by means of the blood.

The Word: the Believer's Code of Ethics

The Master said to His disciples in John 15:3: "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you".

"Ye are clean". But it's not a one-off event. As already stated, we must continually be cleansed by the Word. David asks and then answers in Ps 119:9: "How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping *it* according to Your word (NASB).

The moment the young man ceases to obey the word, his "way" of life (behaviour, conduct) will cease to be "pure".

The Word is meant to be lived; it's the life a saint lives. Any lifestyle outside the Word is sin in practice: "Thy word have I hid in mine heart [as a treasure], that I might not sin against thee" (Ps. 119:11). The result is a sanctified life, a life set apart from sin and uncleanness from which the Word guides us away as a lamp in this dark world of sin:

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Ps 119:105).

For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life (Prov. 6:23).

Sainthood (the way to life) rests squarely on the Word (John 17:17). It changes an obedient person so fundamentally that he is said to have been "born anew" into the very own nature of the Word:

Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:

Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever (1 Pet. 1:22-23).

Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for His seed [the word, Luke 8:11] remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God (1 John 3:9).

The Word is a way of life to be lived; it should translate into *you*. Your everyday life should not be at variance with Word or His word has no place in you. The Word is the ethics Christ has formulated for His church; it is the life you live.

As we are very much aware, every organization or club worth its salt has a code of ethics. The code of ethics governs the conduct of members (sometimes even prescribing a dress code), streamlines organizational activities and ensures that the interests and goals of the organization are protected and realized. A code of ethics is a universally accepted standard for organizational growth, survival and discipline. Do away with the code of ethics, and you strike at the heart of the organization; you drain it of its lifeblood--its essence, its distinctiveness, its structure, and its reason for being. You kill the organization.

If a code of ethics is essential to the life of an earthly organization, how much more the church which is modeled on the kingdom of heaven which comes with higher ethics?

The Bible in its entirety constitutes the code of ethics of the church. Nevertheless, there are specific passages which put greater emphasis on the church's heavenly ethic, crystallizing it for our understanding and practical application. Throughout the Bible wherever God expresses His will for His people, He's at pains to stress that His people must not only pay heed but do and live that will. His will, His standards, His code of ethics as it were, is meant to be lived and expressed in a lifestyle which has its origins in heaven. In the process, the earthly life of carnal pleasures and indiscipline is eliminated outright THROUGH THE SPIRIT, which provides us the heavenly POWER OF RIGHTEOUSNESS:

But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness (Rom. 8:10 ESV)

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry (Col. 3:5; also Rom. 8:13).

One manner of life is eliminated--"put to death"--so that another might be lived. One scriptural name for the heavenly life of righteousness (which replaces the earthly) is "sound doctrine". It is not merely a creed; it is a way of life. The sound doctrine of Christ is an essential spiritual rudder in the life and behaviour of the church. The apostle Paul instructed Titus, the pastor of the Assembly in Crete:

But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine (Titus 2:1).

As it turns out, the "sound doctrine" is a 'code of ethics' which regulates how the various age groups in the church ought to behave in relation to the church itself [i.e. fellow church members], their family and the society at large; it defines the spiritual, moral and social conduct of the called-out ones of God.

The emphases the apostle places on certain godly behaviour patterns in his definition of the contents of the sound doctrine definitely hint at the possible aberrant behaviors then prevailing in the Cretan church and which he sought to correct. Early on, he gives us an authoritative insight into the collective character of the Cretan islanders in Tit. 1:10-13:

¹⁰ ... there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. ¹¹ They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. ¹² One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." ¹³ This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith (ESV).

The sound doctrine of Christ is the life they ought to have lived, but sadly many still lived the old Cretan way. So Paul wrote to Titus, "Speak thou the things which go with sound doctrine".

The 'things' stand for manners, behaviours, conduct. Their everyday behaviour is to reflect the sound doctrine; they are to be the sound doctrine in action.

So if you are an elderly man, how should you live the sound doctrine in terms of your familial, communal and faith relations?

That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience (Tit. 2:2).

I don't know if you will agree, but some old folk are badly prone to fits of anger. And pugnacious too! At the least provocation, they will let fly and ramble on and on. That's not the way to live the sound doctrine as an elderly man in Christ. The way of the sound doctrine is to remain sedate, dignified and restrained in your social relations as an elderly man in Christ. There should be no room for others to 'justifiably' look down on you despite your old age.

Meanwhile, physical frailty should not mean a corresponding decline in spiritual life. A deterioration of the flesh is not necessarily a deterioration of the spirit. It turns out it's quite the opposite. The apostle Paul wrote, "... but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day " (2 Cor. 4:16). Therefore, the older brothers should not consider themselves a spent force in the faith but remain healthy (Grk) in faith, in love and in endurance. They should continue to demonstrate faith in trial, love for all and endurance in tribulation and do it well. After all, they are supposed to be the *veterans of the faith*, having grown in "grace and in the knowledge of our Saviour Jesus Christ". Their spiritual experience should greatly enrich the young in faith. The apostle John wrote:

I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known Him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father.

I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known Him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one (1 John 2:13-14).

Old age is no excuse to slack off on one's spiritual life in Christ. It should rather sharpen your spiritual senses and deepen your appreciation of the things of God. Because you have known Him - for long and intimately - He who is from the beginning.

What about elderly women? How are they supposed to live the sound doctrine?

The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things;

That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children,

To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed" (Titus 2:3-5).

The usual tendencies (behaviour patterns) of ungodly elderly women fly in the face of the sound doctrine. They tend to be "false accusers" and, specific to the Cretan society, tended to take in too much wine at a time. Elderly sisters should not continue in such behaviour; it will only compromise their ability to live lives which conform to holiness.

The dignity of age belies it, but it's common knowledge that old ladies can really harass with their tongues! Knowing full well the reverence and credibility their age confers on them, they know they can't really be challenged if they frame a person they particularly resent or tell outright lies or gossip about others. Soon it becomes a habit, and these old ladies idle away time by chattering about other people's lives, the spouses of those people and whatnot. When the chatter ceases or there's no one else to carry it on with, the oldies may kill their loneliness and boredom with some booze!

The sound doctrine prescribes a holy and more profitable living for elderly women in Christ. In addition to eschewing lies and wine, they must be "teachers of good things". And the 'teaching assignment' should not be a tall order. Why, they possess accumulated reserves of godly wisdom and real-life experiences to draw on in teaching their 'students' - the young women in Christ - many "good things", namely that they be "sober", that they love their husbands and children, that they be discreet, chaste, good homemakers, and submissive wives.

However, if the elderly sisters will be as effective in teaching the young as the sound doctrine obligates them, they themselves must have practised the virtues they intend to pass on to the young.

In another pastoral letter (1 Tim.), Paul tells Pastor Timothy what to look for in identifying true Christian widows worthy of support. The criteria are the fruits of their Christian life:

1 Tim 5:3-6

³ Honour widows that are widows indeed.

⁴ But if any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God.

⁵ Now she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusteth in God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day.

⁶ But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.

1 Tim 5:9-10

⁹ Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man.

¹⁰ Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work.

As teachers, the godly lives of such widows will make a great impression on the young sisters. Their lives of faith and devotion (instead of carelessness and wanton pleasure) will do as much - if not greater - teaching as their words. The leadership of the Women's Fellowship whose responsibility it is to instruct the young women in the Lord should take a cue from this and teach not just by their words but, more importantly, by their deeds. They should with God's grace strive to live impeccable lives of godliness so they will act as role models for the young sisters.

The young women, meanwhile, are not to show a disrespectful and/or dismissive attitude towards their senior sisters. The teachings and counsel their seniors give them are the 'sound doctrine' they are supposed to live. It's for their own good meant to give them stable families and a secure future.

The first virtue of the sound doctrine the young women should be taught is 'sobriety', i.e. to be sensible or thoughtful. That's surely a virtue no homemaker worth her salt can do without. For to truly love her husband and children - not the sentimental way consisting in pet names but real love shown with deeds and practical care - it will take good sense and thoughtfulness.

Then they are to be "discreet". One meaning of the word "discreet" is to be careful in what one says; it's to be guarded in speech!

Excessive talking is one flaw of women that goes back a long time! In his time, the prophet Micah advised husbands: "Trust ye not in a friend, put ye not confidence in a guide: keep the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom" (Micah 7:5). Over 500 years later in St. Paul's time, needless chattering was still a women's problem. Instructing Timothy not to include young widows in the list of widows recognized by the church as deserving of support, he wrote:

1 Tim 5:11-13

¹¹ But the younger widows refuse: for when they have begun to wax wanton against Christ, they will marry;

¹² Having damnation, because they have cast off their first faith.

¹³ And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not.

A woman who engages in idle talk and hearsay not only embarrasses herself but also people close to them such as her husband and children. She is never short of troubles and shame: "Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles" (Prov. 21:23). Totally lacking in discretion, the chattering woman discloses things she ought not to disclose (Prov. 11:13) and gossips about matters of no concern to her. She's joined a club of gossips and busybodies, and talking about others, including the internal matters of her household, is her

business. As a result, she has little time for her family and will gladly prioritize a funeral of no concern to her over quality time with her family if a juicy gossip is sure to be shared.

The sound doctrine strictly forbids such idle, unfruitful life!

Another forbidden vice is un-chastity--a life of illicit relationships carried out behind the back of the good man! Unfaithfulness in marriage (infidelity) is a sure recipe for marital instability and breakdown with harmful repercussions for the children. As evident in the wording of the marital law established by God ('leave one's relations and become one flesh'), a married Christian lady should look on her husband as her best friend and stay close to him. She should not place friendship with her fellow sisters before her commitment to her husband. Neither should she get too forward with men, especially young men, but exercise discretion in her relationships with them. Some husbands can be extremely jealous!

Soon our young sisters will begin to produce fruits. Yes, they must still be taught to be "keepers at home, to be kind and to be obedient to their own husbands", but then the foundation will have already been laid to make it easier for these virtues to be practised. The foundational virtues being referred to are the previous four, namely, being sober, being devoted in demonstrable love to the family, being discreet and being chaste.

A lady who has mastered these qualities is sure to make an excellent homemaker providing care and comfort to her family; she's sure to show kindness to the less unfortunate, and sure to submit to the family headship of her husband.

Cumulatively, her life of virtue and humility will make a positive impact on the public image of the gospel (and hence the church). *People will come to see the virtue of the gospel through the virtue in her.* Her life preaches more effectively than by word of mouth. The "sound doctrine" of Christ is a life, shining as light in a dark world!

Next is the turn of Christian young men. The sound doctrine insists on an all-important single virtue as far as they are concerned--sobriety welling from the depth of their being:

Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded (Tit. 2:6).

Sobriety (levelheadedness) ought to be the chief moral virtue governing the everyday life and conduct of Christian young men. In other words, everything they do should be tempered with sobriety. It's the appropriate remedy for the peculiar flaws of young men. Ever bursting with life and energy, young men are prone to all sorts of sinful pleasures, violence, worldly entertainment and other excesses of the flesh. The cure is Spirit-inspired sobriety.

This was what saved Joseph, the slave, from the amorous advances of 'sugar mummy' Mrs. Portiphar whose husband he served. He feared God and his fear of God made him sober,

causing him to act wisely and sensibly despite the daily pressure Mrs. Portiphar put on him to sleep with her. It was appropriately speaking an incessant daily sexual harassment by the madam of the house, for scripture says that she "cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me" (Gen. 39:7). That is, she 'desired' and 'longed' after him and was determined to have him in her arms at all costs. After all, who was Joseph to turn her down? Was he not her husband's slave boy? Could she not twist him around her little finger?

Mrs. Portiphar must have assured Joseph for the umpteenth time that, as the wife of the master and therefore the second most powerful person of the estate, he had nothing to fear. Would they not do it when the good man of the house was gone? And who would dare tell on her even if they were caught by one of the lackeys in house?

So on a daily basis she cajoled and threatened Joseph, but Joseph would not budge. He feared God and could not bring himself to sin behind his master's back. His answer on each occasion was a defiant 'no':

... he ... said unto his master's wife, Behold, my master wotteth not what is with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand; There is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife: **HOW THEN CAN I DO THIS GREAT WICKEDNESS, AND SIN AGAINST GOD?** And it came to pass, as she spake to Joseph day by day, that he hearkened not unto her, to lie by her, or to be with her (Gen. 39:8-10).

Joseph would not even keep her company! He would not be ensnared.

Then one day she literally caught him by his coat when he entered to do his regular work at a time none of the servants were present. With coquettish glee, she said to him, 'as for today we shall do it, lie with me'. But Joseph shuddered at the very thought of it. Has the moment come to sin against God and to betray my master?

He would reject his mistress and damn the consequences. So he fled from her, leaving his garment in her hands. He fled the scene of temptation; he ran away from the seductress as fast as he could and out the door. He took to his heels; he would not entertain sin one second, just as the word urges young men to do: "Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Tim. 2:22). Again, it says, "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not" (Prov. 1:10).

But a woman scorned--and a powerful one at that! Her anger knows no bounds! It is hell set on fire! Quickly 'Plan B' is on the front burner: 'if Joseph has rejected and humiliated me, I will make sure he doesn't have peace'. She would use the evidence of her attempted infidelity - Joseph's garment - against him. She would level a false charge of attempted rape against him

that Joseph had sought to force himself on her when he was alone with her in the house but then fled when she raised the alarm! She would destroy Joseph for resisting her enticements to sin!

Joseph's unwavering righteous stance cost him his position as the head of Portiphar's servants in addition to being cast into prison. But those were a necessary price to pay for the great rewards of blessing he would reap in *due time* for his faithfulness to God. Imprisonment was his gateway to power and riches as the prime minister of Egypt, his authority only next to the Pharaoh's! If only Mrs. Portiphar knew her enticements and Joseph's subsequent resistance would make him this great!!...

It pays to be a sober, God-fearing young man. If not for anything, it will keep you from the predatory seductresses we encounter daily on the streets, on public transport, in the shops and markets and even in some churches. They are on the prowl at every turn, and they represent a mortal threat to your spiritual life (1 Cor. 6:9; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:3) as well as a purposeful social life now and in the future. Solomon, the notorious connoisseur of women, summarizes the existential threat of the seductress in a few profound words in Prov. 6:25-26: "Lust not after her beauty in thine heart [which amounts to adultery in the NT, Matt. 5:27-28]; neither let her take thee with her eyelids. For by means of a whorish woman a man is brought to a piece of bread: and the adulteress will hunt for the precious life" (see also Prov. 7).

Another area in which sobriety equally proves beneficial to a young man is the management of the resources or finances available to him. The emphasis here is not just 'management' but *prudent management*. And that's untypical of the young man who's so given to frivolous pursuits and pleasures to be sober. He's a spendthrift. He lives for the present. He makes money, or somehow comes by it, and blows it all on the whimsical desires of his heart as if there's no tomorrow!

Our digitalized world today is a bad time for a young man (or woman) who's poor at financial management all because he lacks sobriety! Clueless as to where his true priorities lie, he would have every electronic gadget on sale! But woe betide him financially! What with our markets crammed with electronic gadgets of all sorts - from smart phones to ipads - with newer versions furiously competing to crowd out the older versions! Impulse buying is his ruin!

The same was the fate of the 'prodigal son' (Luke 15). He went on a spending spree to pay for his 'high life', a life of partying and vanity, and he dissipated his entire fortune, a fortune of a lifetime! Would such a young man be in a position to start a family, let alone provide for them?

If he's ill prepared to provide for his family, he should not consider himself part of the body of Christ. Scripture counts him an infidel of the highest order, a renegade, a denier of the faith:

I Tim 5:8

But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.

So much for not being a sober-minded Christian young man!

Sobriety is an important spiritual asset every worthy Christian young man should have. Especially at this end-time when we must develop in spirit through constant prayer, etc as we await the return of our Lord Jesus (1 Pet. 4:7, 1:13). A sober mind attained with the help of God's Spirit will keep the many distractions that will threaten your spiritual life as a young Christian man at bay. You will sift the wheat from the chaff and focus on the things that are truly important, the things of lasting value:

Phil 4:8

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

Amen!

Next, the apostle turns the spotlight on the pastor himself; he must not only teach the sound doctrine; his life must especially preach it.

In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity,
Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you (Titus 2:7-8).

The preacher ought to be the paragon of virtue, the showpiece of excellent Christian life "in all things". That is to say, he ought to be the quintessence of the Christian life in his personal life, family life, social life and pastoral life as spelt out in chapter 1:5-9

⁵ For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee:

⁶ If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly.

⁷ For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre;

⁸ But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate;

⁹ Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers (Tit. 1:5-9).

Although in chapter 2 the whole set of qualities which qualify a brother to be appointed an elder to oversee an Assembly ("a bishop") has been condensed into the words, "in all things be

a model of good works", it in no way lowers the bar. On the contrary, it raises the bar to involve the whole gamut of the pastor's life--from his speech to his teaching! Practically, every aspect of his life should conform to the sound doctrine, with no part of it either directly or indirectly betraying it.

Yes, he preaches the word; that is his vocation. But that's not enough. He only preaches the word at regular intervals, but now *he should be the word in flesh and blood. He should put flesh on the word - and his skin should be the first to embody it!* He should live the word he preaches and live it so well that it comes to define him.

He cannot afford to let the Word and his lifestyle clash. In all things, in all circumstances, the preacher must reflect the word; otherwise, he does great disservice to the message of the gospel. This is because he falsely portrays it to be impotent to transform people to lead righteous lives, and he's the perfect example of it! If you fall short of the very standard you preach, who else should strive to attain it?

That is why Christ warns us in the *Sermon on the Mount*:

Judge not, that ye be not judged.

² For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

³ And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

⁴ Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?

⁵ Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye (Matt. 7:1-5).

In other words, judge not if you are guilty of the same offence of which you accuse and judge others. Yet the preacher's charge entails a fair amount of 'judging' so far as he must "reprove" sin, "rebuke" sinners and "exhort" with all patience. Paul wrote to Timothy, his protégé:

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom;

² Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine.

³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;

⁴ And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

⁵ But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry (2 Tim. 4:1-5; also Col. 1:28).

It turns out that the preacher of the "fables" also has "itching ears" for he is not up to the mark. He and the congregation are tarred with the same brush! His life does not reflect the sound doctrine. He has failed to fulfill his solemn charge before God Almighty and the Lord Jesus Christ who is soon to return to "judge" mankind on the basis of His righteous standards committed to the preacher to live by and to preach!

The result is a massive failure to justify the ministry entrusted to him by the Lord. On the day of His return, how will this preacher account to Him?

He will be judged and convicted on two counts:

1. For being a hypocrite:

Rom 2:3

And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?

2. For giving unbelievers the opportunity to make mockery of God:

Rom 2:17-24

¹⁷ Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God,

¹⁸ And knowest His will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law;

¹⁹ And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness,

²⁰ An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law.

²¹ Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?

²² Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?

²³ Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?

²⁴ For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written.

If as a preacher you fit the above picture, you have betrayed the trust of God. Instead of silencing the unbelieving by your life of holiness and good works, you have exposed yourself to ridicule *as a breaker of your own standards* and thus reduced the gospel to a myth. 'It's impractical; it can't be lived. Not even for a pastor!', critics of the faith point to you. You have denied the power of the gospel to make people holy, and the evidence is your own life (2 Tim. 3:5). The evidence is not far away; it's not somebody else's life but your very own quarrelsome, cheating, mean life!

And don't take refuge in the usual self-justification some ministers make to explain away their bad behaviour: follow my words but not my lifestyle. It's completely unacceptable. Jesus

described the hypocritical Pharisees in such terms not because He wanted His ministers to emulate them but because the mass of the people looked to them for instruction and therefore could be easily influenced by their aberrant lifestyles. So the Lord called on the people to distinguish between the two:

Matt 23:1-7

Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples,

² Saying The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:

³ All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.

⁴ For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.

⁵ But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments,

⁶ And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues,

⁷ And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.

They generally taught the right things because they sat in "Moses' seat". Yet their motives were wrong and impure. To them, teaching was an opportunity to lord it over the people and to gain fame. This was what motivated them just as many are motivated today by pecuniary interests (1 Tim. 6:5).

The unwelcome sacrifice is the sound doctrine witnessed and preached to the world in flesh and blood. The ethical code of the sound doctrine relative to the minister does not even put teaching before lifestyle. It tasks the preacher to be a "pattern of good works in all things" before it names faithful teaching in a dignified, sincere manner as a subset of the good works. *The assumption is that you will have preached to yourself and truly converted before attempting to preach to others.*

This is what makes your message highly credible; it's also your weapon and your trump card against opponents whereby you may silence them because they have nothing to hold against you. Armed with truth in your walk of life, your victory is guaranteed; you are a spiritual fortress. There's nothing that can be done against you (2 Cor. 13:8).

Besides, you will have done the cause of the gospel a world of good. Your holy life and good works will earn the recognition and respect of the world and so put the gospel in a good light. Your reward is a glittering golden crown of life!

The last category of members the apostle exhorts to live the sound doctrine are Christian slaves, the ancient equivalent of today's employees and apprentices.

Up to this point, the principle the Apostle Paul has been hammering on throughout the passage is that each Christian is a representative of the gospel and therefore should see himself as such and behave as such. To the Christian servant or worker or apprentice this is especially crucial. His life is under close observation on an almost daily basis and the least infraction he makes of the tenets of the faith is seen in broad strokes. But the opposite can also be true: he puts the gospel in a favourable light if he lives a flawless godly life as a worker or servant. So the apostle instructs:

Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again;
Not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things (Tit. 2:9-10).

It's another exhortation to a life of conformity with the sound doctrine of Christ in broad terms. It's please your masters in "all things" (except where it amounts to disobeying God, Acts 5:29) so that you may "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour Jesus in all things". Your Christian life is the adornment by which you decorate the teachings of God, the means whereby you make the teaching attractive.

In practice, the instruction to servants to "adorn the doctrine of God" by an impeccable lifestyle of holiness is a word to all Christian workers of all hues in both public and private employment. Unlike the slaves of yesteryears, we don't necessarily have "masters" as Christian employees or even as skilled workers hired for limited periods, but we do have seniors over us whom we should "please in all things". And given that as true Bible believers the 'peculiarities' of our faith, like Sabbath keeping and abstinence from unclean meats, make us stand out, how we conduct ourselves would attract particular interest; we would be the cynosure of all eyes. And critical fault-finding eyes with a view to identifying character flaws and peccadilloes in us, especially with regard to, but not limited to, our work and professional conduct.

Such was the situation Daniel, a Jewish slave-exile in the royal court of Babylon, found himself in. He was not a closet believer; he proudly lived the holy standards of God even in defiance of the powerful monarch of the most powerful kingdom on earth! When king Nebuchadnezzar ordered that the young Jewish exiles schooling in his palace be given daily rations of the palace food, he was unprepared to compromise his faith and heavenly life of holiness. He resolved to defy the king: "But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself" (Dan. 1:8).

Such was the height of Daniel's commitment to godliness; the fear of the king would not replace his fear of Yahweh. Obeying God was everything. That was his life, the life he lived in private and in public. And all eyes were on him, not only because of his 'nonconformist'

obedient life of holiness but also because God had him promoted in the kingdom above all his peers, who were indigenous royals of the land and therefore saw themselves as more deserving. Even so, God, the Possessor of heaven and earth and the true promoter of men (Ps. 75:5-7), raised Daniel above his heathen peers to their chagrin and discomfort, for He who controls the hearts of kings (Prov. 21:1) put it in the heart of King Darius of Medo-Persia to thus exalt Daniel. This set his enemies plotting his downfall. But they could not find one instance of dishonesty in him, one instance of fraud or bribery committed by him. Both his private and public life was beyond reproach. Yet he was a political appointee susceptible to all the temptations of high office. Corruption, patronage, cronyism; they all are tested his integrity but not one prevailed! We read in Daniel chapter six:

It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom an hundred and twenty princes, which should be over the whole kingdom;

² And over these three presidents; of whom Daniel was first: that the princes might give accounts unto them, and the king should have no damage.

³ Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm.

⁴ Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him.

⁵ Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God (Dan. 6:1-5).

How admirably Daniel obeyed God. What Daniel wouldn't remiss in doing was obeying the law of his God. That was the one invariable fact about Daniel. And this was what made him so noble in character.

All the same, his enemies were determined to nail and destroy him. So they tricked and flattered king Darius into ratifying an obnoxious decree purposely made to entrap Daniel that no one should make a petition to a deity or a man--except to the king--for the next 30 days. To all intents and purposes, they called for a freeze on prayer, and that to be enforced with royal decree which was unalterable. The penalty for breaking this Daniel-specific anti-prayer law was to be thrown into the lions' den (vv. 6-9)!

By all standards, this was a senseless, draconian law serving no meaningful purpose but merely a contrivance to nail Daniel. The king was only won over by the employment of flattery. That no deity or man should be petitioned for 30 days except him must have flattered him no end; it meant he was the greatest being in the universe, greater indeed than all the gods let alone mortal men, dead and alive! The plotters cunningly appealed to the king's sense of vanity and got him to unwittingly work against Daniel, his darling appointee. The king was now possessed

of megalomania. He was greater than all and was therefore in a position to grant all requests--at least for the next 30 days!

But Daniel was possessed of the life of God; "an excellent spirit was in him" (v.3). He couldn't be stopped from living his life of which prayer was a vital component. Thus "when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime. Then these men assembled, and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God" (Dan. 6:10-11).

Early morning, the plotters were before the king to report on their fantastic finding--Daniel at prayer as usual:

¹² Then they came near, and spake before the king concerning the king's decree; Hast thou not signed a decree, that every man that shall ask a petition of any God or man within thirty days, save of thee, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions? The king answered and said, The thing is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not.

¹³ Then answered they and said before the king, That Daniel, which is of the children of the captivity of Judah, regardeth not thee, O king, nor the decree that thou hast signed, but maketh his petition three times a day.

¹⁴ Then the king, when he heard these words, was sore displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him: and he laboured till the going down of the sun to deliver him.

¹⁵ Then these men assembled unto the king, and said unto the king, Know, O king, that the law of the Medes and Persians is, That no decree nor statute which the king establisheth may be changed.

¹⁶ Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions. Now the king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God whom thou servest continually, He will deliver thee.

Flattery at the passage stage and flattery at the enforcement stage: Daniel by praying in defiance of the royal decree duly sanctioned by the king demonstrated that the king was not after all the great potentate who was worthy of all petitions as the law portrayed him to be. Moreover, his enemies argued, the law of the Medes and Persians was irrevocable and so Daniel, the offender, must cast into the lions' den in accordance with the law. This time, the king was not enthused by the flatteries. His heart went out to Daniel and tried all he could to get him off the hook, but he was prevailed upon to carry out the sentence because the law was unalterable.

It turned out the Medo-Persians were not the only experts at unalterable things. Daniel's God was unalterable too in his faithfulness, and Daniel could fully count on Him to deliver him. Curiously, the king verily believed the same to be true. So he said to Daniel, "Thy God, *whom thou art serving continually*, He, will deliver thee" (*Rotherham's Emphasized Bible*). The sense

of the Aramaic in the present continuous tense is that *he was serving God even now* in his defiance of the irreversible Medo-Persian law against prayer. The Word of God was his way of life, and the way he lived it so faithfully made it attractive. Indeed, it had long won the admiration of the king and I dare say that of his detractors but for their envy, because tried as they did they found "none occasion or fault" against him!

His only 'fault' (if it could ever be called a fault) was that he loved God to a fault! It was for this that he was cast into the lions' den as his enemies watched with glee!

Soon morning came. It had been a long and torturous night for the king. He desired no food and he desired no music or entertainment. He was overcome with sorrow because of Daniel in the lion's den. Looking somewhat haggard from a night of fast and vigil, King Darius went first thing to the lions' den, hunched over the mouth of the den and called out to Daniel in a lamentable voice half hopeful, half afraid:

'Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?' (Dan. 6:20).

From the recesses of the pit-like den, Daniel answered:

'O king, live for ever.

'My God hath sent His angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before Him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt' (vv. 21-22).

The hell planned and imagined for Daniel by his enemies proved to be a night of praise for him in the company of an angel. This was because he was blameless both in the sight of God and in the sight of the king. The force of the Aramaic is *purity* for "innocence" and *[no] crime* for "[no] hurt". Daniel's purity of life as an obedient child of God had a bearing on his public conduct. He was not only law-abiding but also his public life in serving the king and the kingdom was above board.

God would not abandon such an innocent servant of His to be devoured by lions. So He sent His angel to keep the mouths of the starving lions tightly shut while Daniel remained in the den. The effect: the unalterable law of the Medes and Persians had not yet realized its full effect. As far as the logic of their legal system was concerned, a law had been broken and, in so far as that broken law was irrevocable, the fitting punishment ought to be meted out at all costs. The punishment was irrevocable too or the law would not be irrevocable. But as it stood, the irrevocable law hanged in the balance. To bring it to full effect, the starving lions had to chomp on some human flesh and thereby ensure that the sentence was duly carried out. If Daniel's flesh has been refused, well, maybe he's truly innocent (and the lions know it). Now let's just

see how these same lions will welcome his enemies - just so the unalterable law is not revoked but fully complied with at all costs as they insisted not long ago before the king!

So Daniel was pulled up from the den unscathed and into the den were cast his enemies and all their families. This time, it was party time for the lions (vv. 23-24).

Daniel had already made the Word of God attractive by his life of godliness, but now he made it even more attractive by his miraculous deliverance from the lions. He who faithfully obeys God is forever entitled to His deliverance.

Notice this also. Obeying God can never be a 'crime' so any accusation on the basis of such is not an 'offence' in reality. It's a complete absurdity to fault and convict anyone for obeying God. Any such punitive judgment is therefore a travesty of justice and, even if meted out, will not hold. There will certainly be deliverance and a vindication. If not now, it will be in the age to come!

In the case of Daniel, reverent King Darius issued a proclamation in all his realm extolling the unmatched greatness and power of the God of Daniel and calling on all men to reverence Him:

²⁵ Then king Darius wrote unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you.

²⁶ I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for He is the living God, and stedfast for ever, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and His dominion shall be even unto the end.

²⁷ He delivereth and rescueth, and He worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions.

²⁸ So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian (Dan. 6:25-28).

So what lessons might we draw from the life of Daniel?

1. If you follow God faithfully, your devotion will attract the secret admiration of all and yet the open hostility of some of these same people because of your inevitable rise to greatness by divine favour.
2. Your enemies will gang up against you, but if you persist in faith and obedience, God will supernaturally intervene in the situation, deliver you and put the enemies in the hole they dug for you.
3. Their backfired plot will bring you even more honour and make the word more praiseworthy!

Daniel "adorned" the doctrine of God by his life "in all things". God demands the same from us. In our working life, He requires that we obey our seniors in all aspects of our work by not answering them back or pilfering from them but by showing perfect loyalty so that we may

show the beauty of the sound doctrine in all things. *The Word of God has inherent beauty, for it has been "purified seven times" (Ps 12:6; Prov. 30:5). All that is expected of us is to show the beauty of it by our life of humility and faithfulness in the workplace.*

The Christian driver's mate, for example, should not stoop to pocketing passengers' change or some of the collected fares. It's pilfering! The same applies to apprentice tailors and mechanics. Always give your masters' change to them when you run errands for them. If he lets you keep it, it's all well and good. If not, you are blameless before God.

For office workers, don't inflate your out-of-pocket expenses for your employer to reimburse you much more than you spent. That's a form of pilfering! So too a misappropriation of the fund for the day to day running of the office.

Similarly, skilled workers like masons and carpenters should not artificially inflate the cost of materials and supplies and then pocket the difference. Neither should mechanics collude with shop owners to sell spare parts to car owners at inflated prices and share the difference with them. We should be "content with our wages" (Luke 3:14).

The slightest dishonesty on your part as a professed believer will take the shine off the gospel. Whether you realize it or not, your conduct in the workplace represents the gospel. Your senior officials and co-workers see and evaluate the gospel through you. You are the yardstick! You cannot afford to obscure the beauty and glory of the doctrine of God just because of your bad behaviour. The instruction is to be submissive in all things. This rules out answering back and arguing with the boss because he is fond of picking on you, although you don't see where you ever got it wrong! It also rules out seeing yourself as your own little boss and therefore doing things your own way. 'After all', you reason, 'no one person is the repository of all wisdom'! Nay, he employed you to please him, and God says please him you should.

But why is the Lord so insistent? The world is a harsh and unfair place. Too much humility and straight dealing will keep you at the bottom forever. The Lord says He knows all about that, but still He insists it's *possible* to live His sound doctrine in "this present evil age" (Gal. 1:4). It's doable.

The means is His Grace! By it He teaches us righteousness, and by it He deposits in us the power to live the righteous life, setting us apart from all others:

¹¹ For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,

¹² Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;

¹³ Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;

¹⁴Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works (Titus 2:11-14).

The rationale behind the sound doctrine is grace; it's the whole point of grace. The purpose of God's grace in our lives is to make us righteous. And it has the power make us so. This is because divine grace places us in a unique position to tap into the heavenly resources otherwise beyond our reach for holy living pleasing to God. With grace, we don't have to rely on our own human strength to please God; we don't have to strain ourselves to do the will of God, otherwise "grace is no more grace" (Rom. 11:6). And yet, holiness is not sacrificed. Divine grace has released into our lives the Spirit of God and His enabling power of righteousness. Our transformed lives are the testimony to the ever-working power of divine grace to turn sinners into saints. Our resultant holy lives vindicate grace since, with grace, the focus is no longer us, but "it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). This is because we have made Him the Lord of our lives and He's able to empower us to do all things. Thus an unholy life is no evidence of grace; it's a denial of Christ as the Lord of our lives (Jude 1:4).

Yet we are to live "righteously and godly in this present world" of sinners and crooks and cheats, while we await the glorious return of our great God, our Saviour Jesus Christ, "who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works".

If our lives run counter to the "good works" Christ redeemed us from lawlessness to do, it is not His grace that has failed us; it's because we received His grace in vain (see 2 Cor. 6:1). We refused to be taught by the Lord Jesus, the Grace of God, and to be moulded by Him. We proved obstinate and went our own way.

We trampled underfoot the "sound doctrine" because we discounted the heavenly instrument for living it--the grace of God. We will have missed the goal of grace which is the same goal of redemption--a transformed life of righteousness (Tit. 2:14; 3:8, 14).

In short, our life must conform to the sound doctrine of Christ as Paul instructed Titus to teach the Church in Crete or we will have failed to avail ourselves of the grace of God in our lives. However, the call is to proclaim our statement of faith to the world by our life, not just by our words.

And the grand purpose of it all is to ensure that Christ bears the glory. That is why His word has continuous cleansing power:

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; That He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,

That He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:25-27).

Christ will bear the glory by His *continuously cleansing* Word (the sound doctrine) lived in the everyday lives of His people! He is building "a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish". Halleluiah!

The Glorious Church is orderly and disciplined

God is not the author of confusion. The church the Lord Jesus is building has a structure going all the way to heaven, and men and women have their assigned roles.

Earlier we saw how the Lord has made us, the members of His church, equal, honourable citizens of His household as kings and priests to God. If so, is there no structure of responsibility or leadership? No hierarchy? No pecking order?

Sure, there is, for "He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-13).

In Romans 12, the same Apostle Paul teaches that while we are one body, we don't have the same office and therefore each should know his place in the church kingdom and not usurp another's God-given role but rather concentrate on fulfilling the duties of his particular office. If not, he who usurps or exalts himself 'in his mind' (i.e. think) above his divinely assigned position does so in vain. This is because when God assigns an office to an individual, He gives him the commensurate ability or "measure of faith" to carry it out (Rom. 12:3-6). Thus without the commensurate ability of grace, what one claims to be remains just that--an empty claim with no deeds to prove it. It's an exercise in self-deception (Gal. 6:3).

The apostle Peter similarly exhorts us:

"As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

"If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen (1 Pet. 4:10-11).

So then, be careful how you conduct your affairs in God's church. You can't do more than the role given you from above (John 3:27). The Lord Jesus Christ as the Head of the Church has assigned specific roles to different members of His body (the church) as He sees fit. The church is well structured under Christ:

“And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues” (1 Cor. 12:28).

Christ is the Master Builder; we are the instruments of His architectural work. We cannot dictate to Him where to place us in the building of His church. That's His prerogative; we dare not interfere! (See Isa. 45:9; Jer. 18:6).

In the Book of Revelation, in each of the seven letters to the seven churches, we come upon the expression, "to the angel [Grk *messenger*] write". The reference is not to the angels in heaven, but to the particular human under-shepherd in charge of the assembly being addressed. Christ is "the Chief Shepherd" of the universal church for all time, but He has appointed for each assembly or branch a *male under-shepherd* (1 Cor. 14:34-37; 1 Tim. 2:11-12) to feed and guide His flock on His behalf. The Apostle Peter wrote:

The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed:

² Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;

³ Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock.

⁴ And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away (1 Pet. 5:1-4; See also Acts 20:28).

These under-shepherds of Christ who are to serve with zeal and with humility as models of godliness are deemed dignities in God's church government. They have power to bind and to loose on earth and even to remit and retain sins (Matt. 16:19; 18:18; John 20:23). They should not be subjected to undue criticism and scorn. The scriptures tell us:

1 Thess. 5:12-13

And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you;

And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves.

Heb 13:17

Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.

The instruction is clear: be submissive to your presiding elders; they play a most important role in your life on behalf of the Lord--"they watch for your soul" through their ministry of guidance by the word and spiritual advocacy and intercession for you. Although they are to serve with utmost humility and selflessness (Mark 10:43-44; John 13:14-15; 1 Cor. 9:19; 2 Cor. 4:5), don't

take their modesty and compassion (Heb. 5:2) for granted. Let them not grieve silently because of your ingratitude and unkind attitude towards them. This will be of no advantage to you.

In the Old Testament, God, not David, cursed a daughter of Saul with barrenness when she despised David, the Lord's anointed, for openly rejoicing before the LORD with total abandon as he conveyed the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem amid royal pomp. Married to King David, she probably felt embarrassed by the king's behaviour and "despised him in her heart", incurring the anger and disapproval of God who searches all hearts. Although she later told him to his face how he had degraded himself before his subjects, David did not personally invoke any curse on her. It turned out God was offended more. We read the account in 2 Samuel:

2 Sam 6:14-23

¹⁴ And David danced before the LORD with all his might; and David was girded with a linen ephod.

¹⁵ So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet.

¹⁶ And as the ark of the LORD came into the city of David, Michal Saul's daughter looked through a window, and saw king David leaping and dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart.

¹⁷ And they brought in the ark of the LORD, and set it in his place, in the midst of the tabernacle that David had pitched for it: and David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD.

¹⁸ And as soon as David had made an end of offering burnt offerings and peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD of hosts.

¹⁹ And he dealt among all the people, even among the whole multitude of Israel, as well to the women as men, to every one a cake of bread, and a good piece of flesh, and a flagon of wine. So all the people departed every one to his house.

²⁰ Then David returned to bless his household. And Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and said, How glorious was the king of Israel to day, who uncovered himself to day in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovereth himself!

²¹ And David said unto Michal, It was before the LORD, which chose me before thy father, and before all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the LORD, over Israel: therefore will I play before the LORD.

²² And I will yet be more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight: and of the maidservants which thou hast spoken of, of them shall I be had in honour.

²³ Therefore Michal the daughter of Saul had no child unto the day of her death.

In the New Testament, Ananias and his wife Sapphira lied to God by lying to the apostle Peter in whom He lived and operated by His Holy Spirit. To the couple, Peter was a man, and yes he was. Yet he was no ordinary man. He was a man in whom God lived as His holy vessel consecrated to His use. To disrespect such a man was to disrespect God who chose him.

The person of the minister is not the issue at all. As a true man of God, he did not take upon himself the honour of appointing himself but God did (Heb. 5:4). In fact, he chose and ordained him before he was formed in his mother's womb (Jer. 1:5). Thus when Miriam (and to some extent Aaron) spoke against Moses by openly criticizing his marriage to an Ethiopian woman, the LORD took her to task: "Why were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?" (Num. 12:1-8).

In the case of Ananias and his wife, both were struck dead on the same day for lying to God by lying to His representative. In Miriam's case, she was afflicted with leprosy for one week. God does not take kindly to those who look down on His servants.

But in every generation some impudent souls tread where angels dare not tread by speaking evil of God's anointed ministers. Be careful not to be counted among such ones. The punishment might be more than you could bear. The Lord calls those who despise His true ministers "natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed":

2 Peter 2:9-13

⁹ The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished:

¹⁰ But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities.

¹¹ Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord.

¹² But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption;

¹³ And shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you (also Jude 1:8-10).

The very grave danger of it all is that when a person speaks against a true man of God, there is always the possibility of that person denigrating the work of the man of God which the Holy Spirit is doing through him. In Matthew chapter 12, when the Pharisees falsely accused Christ of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub, He warned that any word spoken against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, although anyone who spoke against Him in His person then as human would be forgiven:

Matt 12:31-32

Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.

And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.

For one to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit and for God to pronounce him guilty of such high crime, the blasphemer must know or have sufficient reasons to realize that what he spoke against was actually the work of the Holy Spirit of God and not that of a man. He must know from the supernatural work performed that the Holy Spirit is at work in the minister, but then wilfully choose to ignore this clear proof in his malicious desire to run down the man of God. Christ says the sin of speaking against the work of the Holy Spirit, which is His own glorified spiritual Presence in His ministers (2 Cor. 3:17; John 7:39; Gal. 4:6; Mark 16:20; Heb. 2:4), is unpardonable!

That was why Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead in a single day. And Bar-Jesus, a false prophet, was struck blind when he attempted to obstruct the salvation work of the Holy Spirit being carried out through the apostle Paul (Acts 13:6-12).

Don't cross swords with God's ministers; don't 'mess' with them! It will be of no profit to you. Admittedly, though, it's an old problem. For all the great supernatural works God performed by the hand of His servant Moses, many of the Israelites still had cause to malign him. And it all stemmed from envy:

Ps 106:16-18

They envied Moses also in the camp, and Aaron the saint of the LORD.

The earth opened and swallowed up Dathan, and covered the company of Abiram.

And a fire was kindled in their company; the flame burned up the wicked.

The Lord reacted to the envy and rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram (Num. 16) swiftly and decisively with deterrence in mind. None of the rebels survived. One group was buried alive when the earth under them gave way and swallowed them up; the other group was burnt to ashes!

The Lord is building a glorious Church! He doesn't take kindly to those who intentionally and blatantly malign and run down His ministers. Why? Because they not only despise the ministers but also He Christ who sent them and by implication the Father who sent Him. It is an insult that literally stinks to high heaven! As He sent the seventy disciples to preach the gospel in all Israel, the Lord said to them:

He that heareth you heareth Me; and he that despiseth you despiseth Me; and he that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me (Luke 10:16).

The church is a glorious church and the kingdom glorious. Impudence and disrespect for the government of God have no place in the Lord's glorious church-kingdom. It's Satanic in origin and liable to the severest divine judgment. It's an unpardonable sin and he who is so convicted has had the door of salvation slammed in his face!

"When the LORD shall build up Zion, He shall appear in His glory" (Ps 102:16). Jesus returns to a glorious church--a holy, praying, preaching church; a church steeped in the will of her Lord. So let's not be negligent; let's remain intent on the work of the Master:

Luke 12:35-38

³⁵ Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning;

³⁶ And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately.

³⁷ Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching; verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.

³⁸ And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants.

"Those servants" will be honoured and glorified by their Lord. They will "sit down to meat"; they will feast and rejoice. Those servants shall be enthroned as kings and priests by their Lord:

Rev 3:21

To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne.

Rev 5:10

And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.

Rev 20:6

Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

This is the glory waiting to engulf us when Christ "shall come to be glorified in His saints" (2 Thess. 1:10). We will be His glorious harvest from the earth:

Matt 13:37-43

³⁷ He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man;

³⁸ The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one;

³⁹ The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.

⁴⁰ As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world.

⁴¹ The Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity;

⁴² And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

⁴³ Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

We shall be like Him when He appears (1 John 3:2). We shall possess His type of radiant spiritual body shining forth like the sun (1 Cor. 15:44, 49; Dan. 12:3; cp Rev. 1:16). He "shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body" (Phil. 3:21). He will bring the church - you and me - to perfect glory. His own glory which is a reflection of the Father's glory.

And the credit will be His alone. He will bear the glory!

Zech 6:12-13

And speak unto him, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and He shall grow up out of His place, and He shall build the temple of the LORD:

Even He shall build the temple of the LORD; and He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon His throne; and He shall be a priest upon His throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both. Amen!

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