

GRACE & TRUTH



THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Galatians 5:22-23



TRINITY BAPTIST CHURCH
N A I R O B I

Editor’s Desk

We welcome you to read and profit from ‘Grace & Truth’, a publication of Trinity Baptist Church, Nairobi. We believe there is a very great need for serious Biblical literature to be produced in our country of Kenya. We trust your soul will be fed and that you will be challenged from the Word of God. We welcome feedback from you by letter, phone or email. Please also visit us on the web at: www.trinity.or.ke

Keith Underhill

GRACE & TRUTH
Magazine



Cover: The Christian experience is a fruitfullife which is the result of an intimate relationship with Christ through the Holy Spirit. As we live and walk by the Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) will be produced in our lives. Love – the greatest and first of the nine-part fruit marks the Christian as a child of God. (1 John 4:7) This self-sacrificing ‘agape’ love is an overflow of God’s love in our hearts.

CONTENTS

- 3 The Christian Experience
- 4 The Most Important Thing to Pray For
- 7 Common Question #4: Does God Choose People to be Saved?
- 10 The Right Application of Church Discipline
- 14 Take My Intellect
- 16 My Testimony
- 17 If Your Brother Sins
- 23 The God Who Forgives Sin
- 25 The Meaty Forum
- 26 A report on the High School Camp 2014

Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV) of the Bible.

THE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE *Keith Underhill*

A persistent criticism of those who hold to the Reformed Faith (as we do) is that we are only interested in doctrine, we are too cerebral and we are spiritually dead. We agree this is a trap into which many have fallen into. Sadly it *is* possible to have all the right doctrine, to be an expert in theology, and yet not be a true Christian! Where the critics go wrong is in making doctrine and experience alternatives, that is, they *substitute* experience for doctrine. We strongly affirm that right doctrine is the only basis for genuine Christian experience. Put the other way round, all experience must be tested by the teaching of the Scripture. For example, someone testifies that he experienced the power of the Spirit in a meeting when he dropped to the floor. We ask, 'Where in the Bible does it teach that this is something the Holy Spirit does?'

Becoming a Christian is far more than receiving a set of teachings and saying that they are true. You may say, "Jesus is the Saviour", but that does not make you a Christian. Believing is not just a mental act, but an act of the whole soul. Consider what it truly means to have Jesus as your Saviour, the 'experience' you will go through.

➤ You will be convicted of your sin (John 16:8), so you feel guilty, have sorrow that you have offended God, and desire to change. So the tax collector "would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast,..." as a sign of mourning (Luke 18:13). So the Pentecost crowd were "cut to the heart" (Acts 2:37).

➤ You will put your trust in Jesus Christ and Him crucified and find peace of soul resting in Him (Romans 5:1). Instead of sin troubling you, there will be the assurance of sins forgiven. The hymn asks, 'Peace, perfect peace in this dark world of sin?' and answers, 'The blood of Jesus whispers peace within'. What a blessed experience!

➤ You will be full of thankfulness in your heart because God has had mercy on you and saved you from eternal condemnation. Eternity will not be long enough to pour out our hearts in thanksgiving for giving us His own Son. So we abound in thanksgiving (Colossians 2:7), and give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

➤ You will have joy because of sure hope. Through Christ you "rejoice in hope of sharing the glory of God" (Romans 5:2). Joy marks the life experience of the true Christian because no outward circumstances, however bad, can take it away because nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.

➤ You will love the One who has saved you from your sins and given you eternal hope. This love is not just keeping His commandments, but the warm affection that makes the Christian want to do anything if only he can please His Lord. We have not seen Him, but we love Him, and long for that time when we shall see Him face to face (1 Peter 1:8).

Love, joy and peace, together with other aspects of our Christian experience (Galatians 5:22-23), are the fruit of the Holy Spirit working within us. They are one of the great evidences that we are true Christians and not just nominal believers. May the Spirit of God work mightily within us to deepen such Christian experience.

[For more on Christianity as something that must be known and *felt* listen to Stuart Olyott introducing his new book at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rIvMdc-FF4Y>]. Also you can read Jonathan Edward's book: *Religious Affections*.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING TO PRAY FOR

Keith Underhill

EPHESIANS 1:17-18a

We are continuing to look at words written by Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, from prison, to the church in Ephesus. Being in prison he is obviously not able to visit, to preach or to speak with them face to face. But he is very concerned about them. He is always giving thanks for the good news he has heard about them, and he wants them to know more blessing. So *what* does he pray for them? What was the greatest need that the Ephesian church had?

Think of your own local church. What do you need from God so that you can glorify Him? Three answers are common:

- 'Let God do a new thing for us'. Many long for a fresh Holy Spirit baptism of power. No doubt there is some truth in this, but as Christians we already have the Spirit (see 1:13-14), and have experienced 'the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us (1:19).
- 'Let us do a new thing for God'. Many speak of the need for 'full surrender', to be totally dedicated to the Lord and His service. Again there is truth in this, but Christians are already saints = belonging to the Lord (1:2), purchased by the Lord to be His.
- 'Let the church do a new thing'. People look at other churches that are growing and what has worked for them. So they say what we need is a new evangelistic programme, a crusade, contemporary music, community cell groups, etc.

None of these are the great need for which Paul prays. The great need which, if granted, addresses all other needs is for *knowledge*. He prays for "a spirit of wisdom and revelation" "in knowledge of Him" (1:17), and for "the eyes of your hearts (to be) enlightened" "that you might know...". We tend to pray for a change of circumstances when we should first be praying for a change in our attitude in those circumstances. We face many of the same circumstances as unbelievers, but what makes us different is that we have Christian attitudes of joy, contentment and trust even in very difficult circumstances. How is it possible to have such godly attitudes? It is by the power of God in granting us 'knowledge'.

1. PRAY TO DELIGHT IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

It makes little difference whether we read the word “spirit” as our own spirit (ESV) or the Holy Spirit (NIV). Many think it must first be a reference to the Spirit of God as only He can reveal, and this is true. But the result is that we have knowledge. So we can understand it this way: ‘May God give the Spirit who is wise and able to reveal, so that I might have spiritual wisdom and knowledge revealed to me’. This is not a prayer for a further reception of the Spirit, but for the Spirit who already indwells to continue to work and to reveal more.

You must start with God in all your thinking, who He is, why He made you, but only God Himself by His Spirit can tell you these things.

And the more that you need is “**wisdom**”, the knowledge of the will of God (1:8-9), the eternal saving purposes in Christ, which is only possible by the work of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:7-14). Maybe you say you will read the Bible more, but without the Spirit of God the Bible is a closed book. Do you remember Nicodemus, who was an expert in the Scriptures, yet who did not understand (John 3:10)? In the same way, you might read a poem, but if you have no appreciation of poetry it will not communicate to you. You must start with God in all your thinking, who He is, why He made you, but only God Himself by His Spirit can tell you these things. You can look at the world and see all the problems, but you do not know that it is the result of the first sin in the Garden of Eden, and that the only solution is in Christ. This is the wisdom of the Spirit in the 66 books of the Bible.

Then you need more “**revelation**”, not a personal revelation to you of what no one else knows, but a spiritual ability to understand what has been revealed in the Bible. You cannot see anything in the darkness; but even in the light you must have eyes to see. So God ‘enlightens the eyes of your heart’ so that you can see with clear spiritual vision (see Acts 26:18). For example, you can learn about the story of David and Goliath, and know that David defeated him by trusting in the Lord, and that we can similarly overcome God’s enemies by trusting in Him, and that God’s promises about the defeat of the seed of the serpent will be fulfilled. But are you able to apply that to your situation today and overcome your spiritual enemies? This is what you must pray for as you read the Scriptures, assuming that you do read!

This is a very specific knowledge, “**in the knowledge of Him (God)**”. It is more than an interest in Bible knowledge than can win quizzes, for even the demons have that knowledge (James 2:19). It is the knowledge of God as a Person, a personal relationship with Him based upon His self-revelation. It is the difference between being taught that fire burns, and experiencing a burn on your body. The Christian life is to be lived with God at the centre, with God as the very atmosphere we breathe. Everything is to be done in relation to Him, even eating and drinking (1 Corinthians 10:31). We tend to think that only some things are ‘spiritual’ but all of life is lived in the presence of God.

2. PRAY FOR A SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE

The general 'knowledge of God' has a very specific focus, in the three things that follow (1:18b-19). It is not something you do like 'Seven steps to overcoming failure', but having *knowledge* about the hope to which He has called us, His power at work in us, and God's power in us that guarantees it. We need to see our lives as part of God's eternal plan: He is the One who called us, His power is at work in us, we have hope in this world of an eternal inheritance. This is the perspective we need to live mature Christian lives, and it is given to us in the Bible. How often the Bible brings the promises of God about eternity to bear on our present situation (for example, 2 Corinthians 5:6,10).

3. GOD WILL CERTAINLY GRANT YOUR REQUEST

This is the knowledge that is the need of the hour so that we might become mature Christians. The important Biblical principle is that we know who the God is to whom we are praying. So consider to whom Paul is praying as the assurance that this prayer for knowledge will be heard.

(1) God is "*the God of our Lord Jesus Christ*". He is the God of the incarnate Son (John 20:17). In the Old Testament He is revealed as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But now there is a new covenant, and He is the God who has given us our Lord with the determined purpose of giving us a full and eternal salvation. It is in Christ that we receive every possible spiritual blessing we need (1:3). The God who saw our Lord through His incarnation, ministry, death, resurrection and exaltation, will likewise see us through to reach the goal of glory.

(2) God is "*the Father of glory*". He is infinitely glorious, perfect in all His being. As there is no lack of power, wisdom, goodness or love in Him, so there is nothing that can hinder His purposes. As Father he is the source of all glory, He gives glory to the Son, who gives glory to us (John 17:22). Once again there is the certainty of receiving all we need from our Father in heaven.

What should we learn from this prayer?

- The Scriptures are the word of God but they are not sufficient in themselves to lead us to God. We need ability to understand and apply the word, and that comes by the Holy Spirit alone (see John 6:45).
- We must pray every time we come to the Scriptures, for God to open our eyes (Psalm 119:18). God's word does not enter our hearts automatically. It is our responsibility to pray when we read and meditate on the Scriptures, when we hear the word preached, otherwise it will not be profitable. Such prayer in no way cancels mental effort, it actually encourages it (Psalm 1:2).
- The most important need for every Christian is not first of all experience, but true Biblical, spiritual *knowledge*, out of which genuine Christian experience will flow. Is this what you pray for as a priority, so that you can face whatever circumstances the Lord is pleased to bring into your life?

COMMON QUESTION NO.4

DOES GOD CHOOSE PEOPLE TO BE SAVED?

Keith Underhill

This is a question that can cause emotions to run high. Perhaps you think the very question is objectionable, the very thought that it is *God* who chooses being offensive. Before you stop reading consider the following two questions. Are you able to save yourself from your sins? Are you sure you know what the Bible says about this subject? In the paragraphs that follow we shall seek to answer these questions, and others.

1. **The Bible uses the language of God choosing** (see the word 'chosen' or 'elect'). So we cannot simply dismiss it, but must seek to understand what God is saying.

- All Christians were chosen by God - Matthew 24:22,24,31, Luke 18:7, Romans 8:33, 2 Timothy 2:10, Titus 1:1, Revelation 17:14.
- Believing Jews, as opposed to Israel in general, were chosen by God – Romans 11:5,7.
- Christians who make up local churches were chosen by God – in Ephesus (Ephesians 1:4), Colossae (Colossians 3:12); Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 1:4, 2 Thessalonians 2:13), 'Babylon' (1 Peter 5:13), and in the dispersion (1 Peter 1:1, 2:9, 2 Peter 1:10).
- The 11 Apostles were chosen by God (John 13:18).
- Individuals were chosen by God – Rufus (Romans 16:13), the lady and her sister (2 John 1,13).
- Even certain angels were chosen by God – 1 Timothy 5:21.

So the teaching that God has chosen people to be Christians is frequent language in the Bible. Why do we not refer to each other, or Christians in general, as chosen or elect? We ought to, because the Bible does. It is far more common to hear that the sinner should choose God (or Christ), yet this is not the typical way the Bible speaks.

2. **When does God choose people to be saved?** Not in their life time after they have done certain things! In the case of Jacob and Esau, God said that the elder would serve the younger even before they were born, "in order that God's purpose of election might continue" (Romans 9:11). God has an eternal purpose of which the choosing of people to be saved is a central part. Of the Christians in Ephesus it is written that God chose them "before the foundation of the world" (1:4), and not just before they were born. God made His choices even before He created the world. Another word is *predestination*, God choosing the destiny beforehand, in this case eternal glory (Romans 8:29-30). God predestined before He justified, as part of His purpose from eternity to eternity (see Ephesians 1:5,11). God is not like men who make plans as they go along, having to change because of lack of knowledge or change of circumstances.

3. **On what basis does God choose?** Does God choose because of some good thing he sees in a person? This cannot be as the Bible is so clear that salvation is not because of anything we do; it is not by works (so Romans 3:28, Galatians 2:16, Ephesians 2:8-9, Philipians 3:9). While agreeing with this there are those who say

that God chooses because He foresees a person will believe; so, it is said, God chooses those who believe. But this is not the Biblical teaching, for the following reasons:

- * “Foreknowledge” is of persons, not of faith (Romans 8:29). So often in the Bible, ‘to know a person’ is not to know something about them but to have a personal relationship with them. When God foreknew those He predestined, it means He knew them beforehand in love and so planned a glorious destiny for them.
- * Faith itself is a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8). In Antioch it is “as many as were appointed to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48). They were not appointed to eternal life because they believed, but the other way round. So faith is the consequence of God’s saving action.
- * God chooses on the basis of His sovereign mercy (Romans 9:15-16). Paul is answering the objection that when in election God chose Jacob and not Esau then He acted in injustice (v. 14). His answer is that Jacob was not chosen because of anything in him, but only because God is merciful. And who dares question God when He shows mercy to whom He will, none deserving any of His blessings because of their sin? (see v. 20)

God is sovereign in showing mercy. This is the only reason why Israel became His people (read Deuteronomy 7:6-8). Why Jacob and not Esau? Why only one thief on the cross? Why Saul of Tarsus and not other Pharisees? Why you and not some others in your family? It is only because God chose to have mercy on you.

4. **What can we say about those God has not chosen?** God deals with them on the basis of their sins, rendering to them the judgment they deserve. If you ask, ‘Why did God not choose them to be saved?’ there is only one answer, “*such was your gracious will*” (Matthew 11:26). This is in response to God graciously revealing the truth to “little children” but not to the cities of Galilee that would face more severe judgment than even Sodom. Jesus emphasized that the Father can be known only by one “to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (v. 27). It seems that the fact God judges “the vessels of wrath” only serves to highlight the wonder of His salvation of “the vessels of mercy” (Romans 9:22-23).

5. **Is this teaching important and practical?** The Bible is not just a book of teaching for the sake of information. Rather, it is a very practical book, dealing with real life situations of the people of God, and the teaching is given to be of spiritual help. So what help is there spiritually to know that we have been chosen by God to be saved?

(1) It gives genuine cause for **praise** (Ephesians 1:3-4). We are summoned to bless God for all the blessings we have in Christ, and the first one is that we were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. Have you ever blessed God for this? We praise God knowing that we are Christians only because He chose us in Christ.

(2) It promotes **humility** (1 Corinthians 1:26-31). God chose me, not because of anything in me, for there is absolutely nothing in me to commend me to God. It is all and only in Christ, my ‘wisdom righteousness and sanctification and redemption’. I have nothing to boast about except Christ (see also Romans 3:27, 1 Corinthians 4:7).

(3) It is a strong basis for **assurance** (Romans 8:28-30). Think about it! If your attaining to glory in any way depends upon you, you will not make it. You can be *sure* that all things will work for your good because God has a purpose which cannot fail,

and part of that purpose is His predestining you. Consider also how the word 'elect' is used in the following passages to give certainty – Matthew 24:24, Luke 18:7, Romans 8:33

(4) It promotes **zeal** in the Lord's service (Acts 18:10). Many think that if you believe salvation is of God it will lead Christians to do nothing in evangelism. Yet it is precisely the opposite! It is because God has chosen a people that I am encouraged, at the Lord's command, to go and find them. This is what encouraged Paul to continue in Corinth. It actually encouraged our Lord Himself when He was rejected in Galilee (Matthew 11:20-30). Our Lord had no problem in putting in one sentence the teaching that there is a chosen people given by God to Him, and also the demand for faith (John 6:37).

BIBLICAL ANSWERS TO COMMON QUESTIONS

Is a series of leaflets dealing with controversial issues of the Christian faith where Christians have differed. What the leaflets teach is from the Bible and not relying on any church tradition or human authority. It is for you, it is your responsibility before God, to have a Berean spirit, and search the Scriptures to know the truth (Acts 17:11).

If you would like to interact in a calm, sober Christian way with what has been written you may use email <tbc.kenya@ymail.com> or write to Trinity Baptist Church, P. O. Box 57907, 00200 Nairobi, Kenya. Please also go to our web site www.trinity.or.ke

What has been written is from the perspective of the historical Protestant and Reformed Faith as found in the Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689, which in turn is largely the Westminster Confession of Faith of 1646.

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THE RIGHT APPLICATION OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Murungilgweta

There is no doubt that we are all sinners, Christians and non-Christians alike. The most serious and godly Christian is susceptible to sin, hence the need for discipline. The difference between the sins of the genuine believers and those of non-believers is that the former have confessed their sins to the Lord Jesus Christ and have received forgiveness. They have trusted Jesus Christ who alone has the power and willingness to satisfactorily deal with sins. They have repented of their sins to God and have sought His pardon. They have obtained remission of sins and are sure that they are accounted as righteous in His sight, on the account of the merit of Christ, their Saviour.

Believers demonstrate their faith and repentance by living as those who genuinely hate sins and truthfully love their Saviour. Christians are saved to be holy and blameless. This does not mean that they never commit any sin. It means that since they hate sin, they want to be rid of it as soon as it comes upon them by constantly repenting. The Holy Spirit of God who dwells in them prods them towards a life of righteousness and pushes them away from a life of sin. No true Christian is happy to sleep in the same bed with wickedness. Christians are serial sin killers! They are not content to kill some of their sins, they are bent on being rid of every sin whatever it is. This is the life of fruitfulness. They put off the old self and they also put on the new self after the image of Christ in true righteousness and holiness.

On the other hand a non-believer clings to his sins; he is a sinner by nature, he loves sins and practices sin. He is held by God responsible for all sins he has committed. Day by day unbelievers add to their bank of sin as they walk and work; they eat and drink sin for they are slaves to sin. Sooner than they expect they will be cast into eternal doom if they do not repent.

The Lord Jesus Christ is saving sinners by the richness of His grace. He then adds them to His church, where they are to grow in grace and in His knowledge. He will soon come for the church as His bride. He gave up Himself for the church so that He might sanctify her and present her to Himself in splendour without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish at His sight (Ephesians 5:27).

God's church is holy and must be preserved as such. The church must keep herself pure by snipping every shoot of sin whenever it comes. Any member in the church who is found to be in sin must be required to repent. If he repents then he has been won over. However, if he is obstinate, then he should be rebuked. A little leaven (sin) left undealt with in one person will affect the whole church (1 Corinthians 5:6). Therefore, those who indulge in sin must be purged from the church so that the church can remain in splendour. The church prepares for the coming of the Bridegroom (Jesus) by rejecting sin and excommunicating unrepentant members.

Why church discipline?

Mark Dever, pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington DC. in his little book, 'What Is A Healthy Church?' says that church membership "... draws a boundary line around the church, marking the church off from the world. *Discipline* helps the church that lives inside that boundary stay true to the very things that are the cause for drawing the in line in the first place. It gives meaning to being a member of the church, and is another important mark of a healthy church." (p.101). One lady who for a long time has been attending the church, (where I serve) asked me, "Why do I need to be a member of this church?" I responded, "So that when you stray from the grace we push you back!" She then asked, "How do you do that?" "By disciplining you", I said. It is important we recognize that everyone is prone to wandering away like sheep, hence the need for a functional perimeter fence. Any church without it will sooner than later cease to be the church of Christ as it will be more like the world, at best and a synagogue of Satan, at worse.

How is excommunication to be done?

We must first of all acknowledge that there is **formative discipline** which is what happens whenever instructions from Scripture are being presented. It is expected that as the whole counsel of God, the Bible is faithfully preached, and as God speaksto the church through the proclamation of the Scriptures, people will take heed and be transformed. If a Christian in the church is not being profited, he will sooner or later show it by going off the target of holiness. Then the pastor, or another member will take notice and do what Galatians 6:1 says,

"Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted."

Discipline is a demonstration of love to the sinning brother. It is a determination to see him live a life that is pleasing to the Lord. This is why it should be done in a spirit of gentleness, with an aim of restoration. It is an indication that you are also deliberate in keeping a close watch on yourself. If you struggle with rebuking or admonishing others please remember this. Others regard discipline as passing a judgement! How far from the truth! Discipline is preventing the judgement!

Where formative discipline is wanting, then corrective discipline will be very difficult to administer. Therefore, the pastors of the church have to give themselves fully to preach the whole counsel of God faithfully. They should preach the gospel privately and publically. They must not withhold anything that is profitable to the church. This is their task to preach as heralds of God and pray for their flock. Having presented God's will to the people, they are to plead to God in prayer for the people under their care that they may not fall into the temptations.

Corrective discipline:

This is what we read from **Matthew 18:14-20**

So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be

bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."

Verse 14 tells that it is because God the Father does not desire any to perish that He has graciously provided for discipline to be there for the saints. Remember He disciplines the sons that He loves (Hebrews 12:5-11). In this way the flesh will be destroyed and the soul saved (1 Corinthians 5:5). Discipline is one of the graces that God has given for the salvation of His people. This means that it is a blessing to the church!

So if your brother sins against you, you have a responsibility to point the offence to him privately, hoping that he will listen to you and ask for forgiveness. There is a need for some conversation and preferably a meeting between the one who is offended and the offender. If the offender repents, then the process of discipline will end at this point (v.15). However, if there is not repentance, then the one offended will return with one or two witnesses who are mature believers. The witnesses may also act as the mediators and are to seek to help the two warring brothers to be objective about the matter at hand as impartially as possible until the truth of every word/accusation is established. The witnesses should be willing to give a report or witness to the church in case such a need arises.

If there is no repentance at this point, then the matter will be brought to the pastors, who are to do all they can to win over the offender. However, if there is no progress for the better the matter will be brought to the church. The church will also seek to bring about forgiveness and reconciliation. If it is not forthcoming, then the church shall *assemble in the name of the Lord Jesus* and shall excommunicate by the decision of the majority (2Corinthians 2:5) the one found culpable. The church has the power to bind and loose on earth so that it is bound and loosed in heaven! In discipline the church assemble *with the power of our Lord Jesus, to deliver this person to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord* (1 Corinthians 5:5). This is say that discipline is also a punishment to the flesh, but a balm of grace to the spirit. It is necessary to emphasize that the flesh is at home here in the world – discipline is the reminder! Therefore, when the elders of the church have exhausted all the means of seeking to bring about repentance in the offender they shall recommend excommunication.

There is no question that this is a serious matter. *It is a grave matter for the one excommunicated* as it is described as 'being handed over to Satan. If you have been excommunicated you need to put things in order by going back in repentance before the church and be released in a good way. Don't run to another church with your sins.

It is a serious matter for the church. Many churches have dealt casually with the souls of people, settling to the extreme ends of the pendulum. Many have been content not to discipline at all while others have had excessive discipline. Balance must be achieved in extending grace and patience on erring members. On the other hand prudence must be excised in seeking to purge the leaven from the church of Christ. So that when the church makes the decision to excommunicate, then it means that the whole church is pledging to treat the person *as a Gentile and a tax collector*. This means that you will pray to them as non-believers and go to them with the gospel and preach to them. That you will not just spurn them, but that you will seek to engage and seek to bring them to restoration. The doors of hearing the gospel and of

repentance must be kept open. They should not be disallowed from attending worship services of the church.

However, there is a sense of cutting fellowship with the person who has been excommunicated. All privileges of members shall be withdrawn. No participation in the Lord's Supper, nor are they to be permitted to make any decision for the church. Such a person should be **treated just like an unbeliever**. In other words he is no longer a gospel missionary, he is a mission field for the whole church!

When God works a revival, one of its most prominent features is to cause His people to return to the written Word. Let us note this carefully. A heaven-sent revival consists not so much in happy feelings and spasmodic enthusiasm and fleshly displays, nor great crowds of people in attendance – those are not the marks of a heaven-sent revival. But when God renews His work of grace in His churches, one of the first things that He does is to cause people to return to the written Word from which they have departed in their ways and in their practices. – **Arthur W. Pink**

Revivals begin with God's own people: the Holy Spirit touches their heart anew and gives them new fervour, compassion, zeal, new light, and life. When He has thus come to you, He next goes forth to the valley of dry bones .. Oh, what responsibility this lays on the Church of God! If you grieve Him away from yourselves or hinder His visit, then the poor perishing world suffers sorely! – **Andrew Bonar**

TAKE MY INTELLECT *Eric Abwao*

When asked which commandment of the law is the most important, the Lord Jesus replied that it is to "**love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength**" (Mark 12:30)

We are to love God with **ALL** our mind, with all our intellect. It is not enough that we have a religious compartment in our thinking. The whole mind is to be given to Him for His service. There can be no excuse for intellectual sloth. He demands us to love Him with our entire mind just as with all our hearts, souls and strength. God is glorified when we use the mind He made to learn of Him, His ways and His Word

Does this mean we must be brilliant to be Christians? Absolutely not! But it does mean that to be like Jesus we must be learners even as He was at only age twelve, '**sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at His understanding and His answers**' (Luke 2:46--47).

Again, does this mean that we must have several diplomas hanging on the wall to be first-rate Christians? It certainly does not. But it does mean that we should discipline ourselves to be intentional learners like Jesus.

Some of us lack in the intellectual realm; our IQ is no more than average. But it is not only great intellects who are commanded to love the Lord with all their mind. All men have minds. They may be one-, two-, or five-talent minds, but we are still expected to invest our intellectual capital for the glory of God. Even a one-talent mind can be developed by use, and we are taught that it must be.

Again and again the Bible reminds us that wisdom is to be sought from God. ***'Yes, if you cry out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding'*** (Proverbs 2:3-6).

Lamentably, many Christians do not associate learning with loving God. In fact, we live in a very anti-intellectual age. That may sound strange in a day when the world's entire body of knowledge doubles every few years, when there are more advanced academic degrees being awarded than ever before, and when everything is moving towards 'hi-tech'.

At root evangelical anti-intellectualism is both a scandal and a sin. It is a scandal in the sense of being an offense and stumbling block that needlessly hinders serious people from considering the Christian Faith and coming to Christ. It is a sin because it is a refusal contrary to the first of Jesus' two great commandments, to love the Lord our God with our minds.

The challenge is before us. On the one hand, the deepening consequences of a lack of Christian mind are ever more apparent in evangelicalism. On the other hand, the alternative to reform are starker and the excuses for inaction less convincing. In short, the time is ripe for repentance and reform as key part of restoring the gospel to evangelicals and evangelicals to the gospel.

There is an intellectualism that is wrong, but it is also wrong to be anti-intellectual. Our passion is not for academic respectability, but for faithfulness to the commands of Jesus. Once again thinking Christianly is first and foremost a matter of love- of minds in love with God and the truth of His world.

If we are to live up to our name as people who seek to define ourselves and our lives by the first things of the gospel, obedience to the first great commandment is not optional. To the extent God has given us minds, we must love God with all our minds and in all our lives in a way that is shaped decisively by Him.

Loving God with all our minds is an act of worship. It requires godly thinking. And godly thinking requires godly learning. And still, godly learning is greatly enabled by godly reading. For the Christian who is able, reading should therefore be seen as an act of worship to God. A depiction of love - loving God with one's mind. Reading for the Christian is primarily an act of worship.

Anti-intellectualism is a disposition to discount the importance of truth and the life of the mind. Evangelicals in our generation have simultaneously toned up their bodies and dumbed down their minds. The result? Many suffer from having fit bodies but fat minds.

It needs to be made clear that faith is not some more respectable religious name for prejudice or superstition. We need to be those with a deep concern for truth. Unless we love God with a growing mind, we will be like Christian versions of the Samaritans to whom Jesus said, **'You Samaritans worship what you do not know'** (John 4:22).

The complex capacity of the human brain is the subject of ever widening scientific wonder. The dizzying potential of the human mind reaches its apex in the possibility of possessing the mind of Christ through the ministry of the Holy Spirit - a possibility affirmed by Paul when he said, 'But we have the mind of Christ.' No computer will ever think God's thoughts. But the mystery, which resides between our ears, has this capacity. Indeed, it was created for this to have the mind of Christ.

The great potential of the believer's mind introduces the great scandal of today's church: Christians without Christian minds, Christians who don't think Christianly.

Dr. A.W Tozer had some arresting things to say about this situation. "Why does today's Christian find the reading of great books always beyond him? Certainly intellectual powers do not wane from one generation to another. We are as smart as our fathers, and any thought they could entertain we can entertain if we are significantly interested to make the effort. The major cause of the decline in the quality of the current Christian literature is not intellectual but spiritual. To enjoy a great religious book requires degree of concentration on God and detachment from the world that few modern Christians have. The early Christian Fathers...are not hard to understand, but they inhabit the highlands where the air is crisp and rarefied, and none but the God-enamoured can come...One reason why people are unable to understand great Christian classics is that they are trying to understand without the intention of obeying them"

MY TESTIMONY

Naigha Ethel AwuorOtieno

Once upon a time I was filthy and horrid; undesirable and miserable. I knew stain and darkness. Fear ate at my mind. Pain has a way of doing this to you and pain was faithful, almost too faithful. I was an unpredictable storm, a ticking time bomb. I was hopeless, lost in darkness, separated from any sense of peace, my sin had overtaken me, to them I was enslaved and yet I had no idea.

On the 14th day of June 2009, I heard an intense love, profound enough to move to my knees, strange enough to make me cry, I was loved. Loved by God, He knew me; He knew what I was all about and still loved me, who does that?

So I clung on to that message, made the sinner's prayer on my knees, and had hope that this God would make things better for me, that was all I needed, something better...

Fast forward to this year I started doubting whether I was really a Christian, I kicked and struggled against the things of the Spirit. I knew the utmost length of sin. I dived into the very pits of evil. Despair wrapped me like a robe, a heavy black stifling robe. Sin and evil prowled my heart.

... So I pleaded to the Lord for salvation. I was desperate. In distress I cried out to the Lord; yes I prayed to God for help. He heard me from His sanctuary; my cry reached to His ears. The Lord sought me earnestly; He burnt into my heart with hot iron.

Christ saved me from myself; He saved me from my sin.

Through Christ I can talk of forgiveness. Now there is hope in me, the hope of glory. The mystery that was hidden has been revealed, Christ in me.

I am now a new creation, the old has gone, and the new has come. Through the blood of Christ my life has been redeemed. I cannot understand the reason why I'm saved except upon the ground that God would have it so. I am now a partaker of divine grace. Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling. Indeed I am nothing without Christ.

IF YOUR BROTHER SINS AGAINST YOU!

SakwaBuliba

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector” (Matthew 18:15-17).

It is clear in this passage that the Lord is dealing with sin between two professing believers. This is significant because sin is clearly defined by the Word of God. Notice therefore that Jesus is not saying, "If your brother fails to recognize your abilities, or irritates you, or offends your ego, or ignores you, or forgets to thank you for some charitable act you did to him, you are to go to him about that." For these kind of offenses, irritations, disagreements, and personality aberrations, we are urged to bear with one another, overlook them, put up with, understand, accept, forgive without saying a word and move on (Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:13). It is noteworthy that Christ is speaking about a brother. Clearly, this passage only applies to Christians, to believers. But when a Christian brother sins against you in such a way that simply cannot be glossed over with love – you do not have an option of ignoring the sin. Sin must be dealt with, according to the Scriptures.

“If your brother sins...” The Greek word used by Christ to imply sin literally means to miss the mark. The mark or standard missed is God's holy law. Sin is a transgression (offense, assault, a breaching) of God's law (1 John 3:4). Sin offends God. The fact that Christ is talking about real sin, an actual violation of God's law is vital because it cautions Christians against taking offense over personality clashes, socio-cultural differences, or lifestyle variations. In life, there are many trivialities, numerous rubs, slights, annoyances and offenses that result when we rub shoulders with brethren but which are not necessarily sinful in nature. In face of such, we must learn in love, not to be too sensitive, judgmental, suspicious, and unforbearing with others. The professing believer must not impute improper motives to others and delight in deriving sinister meanings from very innocent actions of brethren.

Similarly, the fact that Christ is talking about real sin means that personal charges against a brother must be objectively proved from the Bible. Here Christ protects believers from legalism, subjectivism and all arbitrary human prejudices. Thus, if you are going to go to your brother and accuse him of sin you must counter-check the veracity of your charge to be sure it is a real sin and not some personal differences.

Philippians 2:3-4: *"Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others."* You do not go to your brother to chide, harass, punish and humiliate but to help and win him over in love. Irrespective of the harm you may have suffered out of his sinful actions, this is not your turn for settling scores, getting personal justice and balancing scales. A professing believer must not take a gleeful satisfaction in the downfall and public humiliation of other professing Christians, regardless of the magnitude of their sinfulness.

It is important also to consider that no matter how convinced in your own mind of the justice of your cause, you must carefully listen to and weigh your brother's argument, assuming he doesn't immediately agree with your charge. You must consider the possibility that your accusation may be erroneous. Even if you believed that the accused should be guilty as charged, you must give your brother an open chance to respond. The victim must be prepared to hear divergent evidence, and show a willingness to withdraw his evidence if he is proved wrong. In effect, saying, 'Here are the facts that I hold, now let me hear your version (Colossians 3:12-13). Nothing in this procedure tolerates the vengeful agenda of getting rid of an irritant. There is no space in Christ's method to uphold your position, show someone dust, or raise your status in the local church. It is all about bringing a sinner to repentance, which is the ultimate prize to be won!

If your brother sins against you, our beloved Lord prescribes the procedure to follow in dealing with the matter in a godly manner through the following four stages:-

1. First, the Private Meeting of the Two

"...go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone..."(v.15)

Jesus surely understands human nature, doesn't He? How tempting it would be to confront a brother or sister in front of others! So that others should know how wrongly we've been treated. But Jesus shuts out this option. We're to speak in private, keeping the matter between ourselves and the one who has wronged us. If you cannot ignore the offence of another, go tell him his fault. Instead of telling others about the problem, tell him alone. The rule is clear and definite. At this first meeting we are to go, as Paul instructs in the book of Galatians, in the spirit of meekness (Galatians 6:1), not self-righteously, not harshly, not with condemnation. Aware of our own vulnerability, we are to go to an individual, and say something like, "The Scriptures say that what you did is sinful. What do you think about it?" Thus we are to seek to lay hold of the individual's conscience and restore him to a spirit of repentance. But only when we go in a spirit of awareness of our own vulnerability will it yield fruit.

One thing important to note regarding Christ's command *"..to go.."*, is that the offended party is responsible *to go*. "You do not wait for the offending brother to come to you", Jesus seems to baffle His listeners. "You must seek him out and speak directly to him". Christ puts the chief burden of seeking reconciliation on the injured one. The one against whom the trespass is committed is to act. That you should go to the person who wronged you even when you are the victim completely overturns the common wisdom that says, "Since I was the sufferer, I'll wait for that person to come to me." There is no room for this sort of game among the disciples of Jesus. Especially when you are the victim of another's sinful actions, you should be the one who goes and initiates reconciliation. If you are the one who has been wronged, why does Christ demand that you take the burden to *go*? Because Christian love always regards the welfare of a brother as more important than oneself (Philippians 2:3-4).

The phrase “go” taken together with “*when the two of you are alone*” assumes a face-to-face encounter. Of course Jesus didn’t live in a time when people relied on cell phones, e-mail, and other technological media of communication. But in his world, there were still indirect ways to communication, like letters and emissaries. But Jesus says “go.” This suggests that, as much as it is possible, a face-to-face meeting is required. Although this could be a scary prospect, as many of us would greatly prefer the safety of a letter, an e-mail or a text message, Jesus seems to imply a direct, personal, face-to-face dialogue.

The verb translated “...*tell him his fault.*” denotes convict, reprove, challenge, confront, rebuke, stir his conscience, bring him to his senses or awaken the person to a consciousness of guilt. This verb conveys exactness, directness, though not haughtiness or self-righteousness. Jesus says you bring to the attention of the person who wronged you exactly what he or she did. Notice that you are to focus on the particular sin. You are not permitted to throw in lots of other sins to augment your case. Having said this, I must admit that confrontation is difficult. Few of us are good at it, and hardly anyone likes it; bearing in mind that the perceived offender is your brother or sister in the Lord; a fellow Christian who is involved with something sinful but doesn’t repent the error of his ways. It is someone you love and cherish, someone you pray for, one with whom you suffer and persevere together for Christ. The envisaged impact of ‘tell him’ (the confrontation) is to “regain” (the Greek verb means “gain” or “earn” or “win over”) the one who wronged you. This goal can be very hard to keep in mind when you’ve been hurt by someone. Typically, your flesh wants its own pound of flesh. You want to make the other person pay, feel it or at least grovel for a while.

In Proverbs 25:9, it is written, “Debate thy cause with thy neighbor himself; and discover not a secret to another”. Godly men only discuss differences or offences with the person involved, not with others. If you tell others about a conflict with someone, it will be evident you are hateful, malicious, and wicked. You should keep controversies and offences between you and your adversary. If you tell others about them, it is called gossip. In the Bible, it was called backbiting, tale bearing, tattling, and whispering, or slander. These are terrible sins that God hates. It is clear from both the OT and NT that if you have a problem with someone, and you cannot gloriously overlook it, go to him alone and settle it through Christian charity. Put a guard on your heart, and do not even think about telling others. Only say complimentary and kind things about other people (Ephesians 4:29; Colossians 4:6). Gossip can ruin your reputation. Do not talk critically or negatively about others; do not spread news or rumors; do not slander anyone. Gossip is a heinous sin, and it can permanently stain your reputation. When you have a problem with someone, it is cruel and malicious to tell others about it. You do so in order to defame and injure the other party and obtain sympathy for your cause. You seek to hurt another person’s reputation and exalt your own. The holy God of heaven considers such intentions and actions to be murder (Matt 5:21-26).

If your brother refuses to listen to you, however, then others must get involved.

2. Next, the Private Meeting with Christian Friends

“...take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses...” (v.16)

The background for Jesus’ directive here may be traced to the Jewish judicial process, whereby witnesses were used to confirm the testimony of a single individual. The basis for this comes in Deuteronomy 19:15, which reads, “*A single witness shall not suffice to convict a person of any crime or wrongdoing in connection with any offense that may be*

committed. Only on the evidence of two or three witnesses shall a charge be sustained." Notice, once again, exactly what Jesus says here: "But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses." I find the language of this verse quite telling. Jesus does not say, "so that the witnesses can gang up on the offender" or even "so that your side of things will be supported." Rather, he seems to envision a setting in which the witnesses carefully weigh everything that is said, not only by you, but also by the person you're confronting. They're to evaluate, not just your side of the story, but "every word."

As you select witnesses, be careful whom you choose. The person(s) you choose to accompany you should be people of integrity and proven impartiality whom the offender would be willing to listen to. They should be spiritually mature and objective in handling matters in disputation. If possible, avoid people who appear to be too close to you or those who take extreme positions on issues as chances are pretty good that the one who sinned against you will outrightly dismiss their testimony. As much as possible, ask someone who can be truly fair, someone whom the offender will easily trust and respect. The witnesses, of course, serve to keep tempers down, and to keep the reports of the meeting accurate in case anything further may need to be pursued.

The seriousness of this step also makes the accuser reflect on the nature of his charges. "Is this matter so serious that I can get one or two other persons of integrity to go with me; or am I, peradventure, making a mountain out of an ant-hill?" "Was it really sin that occurred or Am I being mischievous?" "Was God's law actually broken or am I upset because the guy hurt my ego?" Sometimes witnesses may come in and discover that the accuser's charges are frivolous. The great benefits of this second step is that most cases that are frivolous, wrong, based on rumors and so forth, are dealt with without bringing them to the public (congregation). Once again not only are reputations preserved, but also the unity and tranquility of the church is maintained.

This second step is pointing out that sin cannot be ignored. We cannot shrug our shoulders, and say, "Ah, well, I have done my bit, let him carry his own cross." Others are to become involved. These efforts may be employed several times, in a loving attempt to lay hold of someone's conscience, and awaken him to the danger in which he has put himself spiritually, and the hurt he is inflicting upon others. The bringing of others into the situation is clearly designed to impress the erring brother or sister with the seriousness of sin.

Bringing along one to two witnesses serves many functions. One purpose is to increase brotherly persuasion against the accused. If the witnesses ascertain that a sin has been committed, they are to reason with the offender and encourage him to repent, confess and be reconciled with his brother. It may be easier for two or three persons to succeed in this task than for one. It is one thing for the offender to disagree with one, but when two others concur in the matter against him, it is unreasonable and arrogant not to submit and repent under such circumstances. Having mature believers as witnesses should impress the offender with the more serious nature of his situation. Most Christians will not want the matter to become public and therefore should be more willing to receive admonitions.

3. Next, Reporting the Matter to the Local Church

“...If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church...”(v.17a)

It is only a guilty brother who will not repent that is brought before the local church congregation. This is not about somebody you just don't like, or somebody you see as a threat to your ambition in ministry or one who opposes every point you raise in a church meeting. This is an offender whose sin has been established by evidence and whose guilt can be reported by more than one person. It is important for the whole congregation to become involved in an attempt to reach the offender. The rationale of telling the church is not so that they might turn their backs on the individual or refuse to have anything to do with him. It is not for them to become finger-pointing condemners, but be fellow-pleaders for a change of heart, urging the individual in question to urgently cease from the sinful actions.

One of the first things a congregation can do in this matter is to pray for the offender. Prayer is everywhere urged in Scripture as a powerful weapon to change and melt people's hearts. Pray that God will grant repentance to the offender, that God will so move that he will turn and recover himself from the snare of the devil. And pray for those who have been damaged or hurt by the sin. So if you cannot do anything else, please pray! Another thing the congregation would do is to urge him to repent, to give up sin, and to give in to the pleadings of the brethren. The collaborative effort of many to impress upon the one involved to see what damage he or she has caused himself or herself is a very powerful tool to turn the person from sin.

Similarly, individuals in a congregation can share with this person experiences they themselves may have had of finding God's grace sufficient in their own lives to resist evil, or to turn from it, once it has been discovered or indulged in. That will encourage the individual to realize that the only way out of his situation is to return to the Lord, who will forgive.

If this bears fruit, then the church has won the brother. Ideally, there is no need to bring the person before the congregation, demanding he narrates the whole episode phase by phase or respond to every charge as there is no embarrassment or any public humiliation anticipated in this passage. The purpose of this process is conviction, repentance and restoration. This third step involves more solemnity, persuasion and authority than the second step. The persons involved, the witnesses, and all the evidence are brought before the church for examination. . If the offender is found guilty by the church and then disobeys the church's instruction to repent and reconcile, then that person is guilty not only of the original offense, but is also guilty of refusing to submit to the decision of the church.

4. Then, the Administering of Church Discipline

“...And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector” (v.17b)

Sadly enough, there are times when a person is so caught up in sin, or so deceived by self-righteousness, that he or she simply won't listen even to the church. In this case, the church should move to the final step: *“And if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector”*. In a last effort to wake someone up from spiritual slumber about his sin, sometimes we have to sever the person's ties with the church. That doesn't mean that we become obnoxiously rude,

but it does mean that we need to make it clear that the person's actions and repentance have cut him off from God's family.

The power that Jesus Christ has vested in his Church, a power manifested in the exercise of church discipline, is one for building up the body of Christ, not for destroying it, for restoration, not for condemnation. It should be exercised as a dispensation of mercy and not of wrath so that the great cause of the Gospel may be attained, that all children of God may be presented faultless in the day of Christ. What Jesus assumes about sin in this text is something most people today, including many Christians, don't understand. Sin isn't some little blemish that can be wished away or ignored. Rather, it's like a malignant tissue, which, if left unresolved, will ultimately metastasize, destroying the individual sinner and wounding the Christian community. So, though surgery for removal can be painful, it is necessary for the health of the individual and the church.

In the culture of the days of Jesus, regarding a hitherto known believer as '*Gentile and tax collector*' was equivalent to saying that he was an unbeliever, not a Christian at all; that he had, by his deeds, declared himself not to be truly a believer, a genuine, submitted believer in the Lord. What is suggested here is that the whole congregation looks upon the individual differently. This does not require any kind of punishment. There are no penalties imposed. There is no attempt to humiliate the individual. The congregation begins to regard him as an unbeliever. In his letter to Titus, Paul refers to certain men, of whom he says, "*Their very minds and consciences are corrupted. They profess to know God, but they deny him by their deeds...*" (Titus 1:15-16a RSV)

If one has resisted the attempts of many to bring him to acknowledge his faults, then this is the condition into which he has allowed himself to fall. He is to be treated, therefore, as we would treat any unbeliever in our midst; with courtesy, yet with sorrow for the sin and the hurt he is bringing on himself, but with hope for his ultimate repentance. He is not to be recognized as being a believer; his deeds declare that he is not what he has all along been professing to be.

Moreover, we must remember that the offender had three clear opportunities to recognize his or her sin and repent. By failing to do so, this person essentially ostracized himself or herself from the community. It's not so much that the church has kicked out the offender as it merely recognizes the breach that is already there. This is implied in Jesus' statement about "regarding" the offender as "*a Gentile and a tax collector.*" These people weren't literally kicked out of Jewish society. Rather, they were either by birth or by choice simply not included. They were outsiders. And so is the person who will not repent of sin when given every chance to do so. Because of his own stubbornness he has lost his right to church membership, and it has now become the church's painful duty to make this declaration—in order that even this severe measure of exclusion may, with God's blessing, result in the man's conversion (I Corinthians 5:5; II Thessalonians 3:14,15).

Revival leads people to take refuge in the cross of Christ. The end of revival is not groans or crying out in agony of soul, but rather the light that comes with true and living faith in the Lord Jesus. –
John R. De Witt

THE GOD WHO FORGIVES SIN

John Muketha

Paul in **2 Corinthians 5:10** states that *'we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.* God has a record of our lives before Him and the judgment of the last will be based on what is written in the books. Only those whose names are written in the Book of Life will escape this awful judgment (**Revelation 20:12,15**).

Christians are in danger of losing the sense of guilt that comes from realizing who we are in the presence of the Holy One. When people think lightly of sin, they will as a result, think lightly of the Saviour. **Psalm 130** encourages us to come out of the depths of guilt and despair to the heights of joyous hope in the Lord as we cry out to God for forgiveness, knowing that He delights in abundant redemption. **Psalm 130:1-2** is a prayer from the heart to the Lord for mercy. *Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD! O Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy!*

The Psalmist was a godly man who considered himself to be a "terrible sinner" before a holy God. Those who have truly come to know the Holy One are also aware of the depths of their sin and guilt. When Isaiah in his vision saw God on His throne, with the seraphim crying out "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts," he said *"Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."* (**Isaiah 6:1-5**)

A glimpse of God in His holiness will plunge you into the depths of guilt and despair, so that you cry out to Him for mercy. May the Lord touch us with such an awareness of our sins that will make us feel wretched and no longer become comfortable with our sin, but cry from the "depths" to be forgiven.

The Psalmist is calling upon God to give attention to his prayer but he is also aware that his is a plea for "grace and undeserved favour". He knows that God who is holy, is also full of grace and mercy. Perhaps he recalled the account of Moses when God put him in a cleft in the rock: *The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, ..."* **Exodus 34:6-7**. We come to a King on a throne with reverence, fear and awe, yet as we do we are encouraged to come because it is a throne of grace.

Without God's forgiveness we are doomed! *"If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared."* (v.3,4). God keeps a record of all our iniquities. Listen to the Lord Jesus in **Matthew 12:36-37**: *"I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned"*.

The Psalmist means, "If the Lord were to add up all my sins and hold me accountable for them, I'm done. I don't have a glimmer of hope." Consider your sins for just the past week, let alone for your lifetime! Include every wrong thought, word, and deed; Sins of commission and sins of omission. Add up all the direct commands of God that you have broken, plus all of those that you have ignored or failed to get around to doing. *Have you loved God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength all the time? Have you loved your neighbor as yourself, with no hint of selfishness or anger? Have you destroyed immediately every wicked thought? Have you been faithful in prayer and in studying God's Word?* God knows all that you have done or not done, throughout your whole life! Without God's forgiveness, you are doomed!

"If You should mark iniquities...". He is saying in effect, *"What if You would never forgive sins, what a mess we would all be in; how terrible it would be for us; no one would ever be able to come to You or stand before You"*. What would he do if God merely judged sin and there was no forgiveness at all. Have you ever thought about that? There is no obligation on the part of God to forgive. If God were to judge and condemn everyone He would not be unjust!

"who could stand?" The God who is holy is bound to take note of our sins and therefore, only punishment would follow since none could stand at His judgement bar. There is no righteous person who can come forward and stand before God if He was to mark and note sin. Would anyone withstand His fierce judgements? Who could look Him in the face and not be moved or shudder knowing that he is without sin? Is there a righteous person who has never sinned?

"But with You there is forgiveness, that You may be feared." (v.4) "But" is a powerful little word which shows the contrast of what is to come against the gloomy statement of verse 3. What a crucial declaration, *"But there is forgiveness with You"*! Without forgiveness, you are doomed, but with forgiveness, you learn to fear God, because you know that He had every reason to condemn you, but He did not. You fear Him because you know that He rightly could have cast your body and soul into hell for all eternity (Matthew 10:28).

"With You there is forgiveness". **Forgiveness** is God's offer of pardon to the sinner. God has the forgiving spirit and a pardoning heart. This is why the Psalmist uses the phrase *"with You"*. Forgiveness is part of the nature and being of God. Forgiveness is not just something that God can do; it is a vital part of His whole being. He is a pardoning and forgiving God. **Micah 7:18**. *"Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love"*.

With God there is this forgiveness because Jesus came into the world. **Ephesians 1:7** states, *"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace"*. This forgiveness is found in Christ because He came into the world and took upon Himself, our sin, guilt and condemnation. He paid the penalty for our sin and guilt by His death as He suffered "the righteous for the unrighteous to bring us to God" He became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God. (**2 Corinthians 5:21**)

"...so that you may be feared". Forgiveness is not seen as an end in itself. It must lead to a change in lifestyle. A forgiven person must come to "fear" the Lord. This is an attitude of "awe, respect and honour" towards God. When one is forgiven there is always the danger of thinking that we can go on sinning just as much as we like. The temptation is to think that "God will forgive, again and again, that's His job". We might reason that as we are saved by grace and God is so rich in forgiveness He will always be on hand to forgive our sins.

If we have received forgiveness it is to give us a deeper awareness of God and a greater sense of His holiness, honour and glory. **1 Peter 1:17** *"And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile"*.

The Christian can't take sin lightly because of God who forgives and the cost of that forgiveness. Forgiveness cost the very blood of the Son of God. This is why Paul can say in **Romans 6:1** *"How can we who died to sin still live in it?"*. The emphasis has to be in the words, *"how can we"*, being what we are, the sons of God, people who have been forgiven" still live in sin?

THE MEATY FORUM *Vincent Kajuma*

"The law of God had always been there. It was only codified in Sinai." I've always fondly remembered that statement, spoken softly from an old throat, but deliberately forcefully, as though conscious of how contrary to established thought it was. I remember the bulbs flooding with light in my brains as it all finally came together. Aha. So this is why Cain knew that he was wrong to kill Abel, even before God's finger wrote 'Thou shall not kill', at Sinai! Ronald Kalifungwa, was one of the four panellists at the Meaty Forum that day with Murungilgweta, Keith Underhill and Ken Mbugua. He went on to show, and very helpfully to me so, the distinction between the eternal moral law in the 10 commandments and the ceremonial and judicial laws, all as given to the Israelites. The topic for that first ever Meaty Forum, was 'What is Truth?'

This year will mark four years since that first Meaty Forum. The Forum has been meeting every second Friday of the month for these last three years. Through these years, it has provided an opportunity for many Bible-loving Christians to be taught, challenged and affirmed in their views. Usually the question to be discussed is posted on social media networks so that people come knowing what to expect. Before 6pm, when the Forum begins, those who come early visit the book-table that has been set up with books available for sale that month. The books often have relevance to the topic of the month. By 6pm, the moderator stands and calls the meeting to order with a word of prayer. He then introduces the panellists and sets the discussion rolling. Often the question of the month will be divided into three or four sub-questions or sub-headings, each of these tackled by each panellist, as the audience listens in and those with questions note them down. Each panellist presents for about 15 minutes. The Forum then enters into a Question and Answer session, where those in the audience quiz the panellists concerning the things they have said, or seek clarification over some things said. The panellists get to respond and take more questions. This goes on until 8pm, when the moderator calls the event to a close and announces the date for the next Forum. For about 20 minutes before the doors close, people are freed to socialize together, even with the panellists.

'Meaty'

The originators of the idea, a group of young people from various churches, named it the 'Meaty' Forum based on the language of Hebrew 5:12, where the author rebukes the Hebrews for not being ready for mature doctrine, saying that they "are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat" (KJV). The Forum is a forum for such 'meat'.

To illustrate how 'meaty' the topics discussed at this Forum have been, last year alone, the following topics were discussed between February and November: Total depravity ("Let's talk about good men and women"), Predestination, ("Predestination -truth or heresy?"), Definite atonement ("For whom did Christ die?"), Irresistible grace, Perseverance of the saints ("Can I lose my salvation?"), Doctrine and holiness, The law and holiness, Courtship, Marriage, Biblical manhood and womanhood.

As one might glean from the topics, the organisers of the forum are not merely interested in what might be seen as the intellectual or cerebral side of the faith, but also in practical matters such as marriage. The last session on Biblical manhood and womanhood created quite a buzz. Many of those who came were challenged out of the societal confusion on these matters.

Influence

The Meaty Forum is open to all. People of different doctrinal persuasions come and as they say 'chop it up' with the rest, with the Bible as the standard line that divides truth from error. One is often pleasantly humbled to hear some of the aged panellists asked questions on things that the Bible doesn't explicitly say (e.g. questions on what happened before creation) and rather than speculate or theologise, the panellist would just admit 'I don't know. The Bible doesn't tell me.'

The Forum is largely attended by young adults, though often a few teenagers or older people will attend. Most of these young adults are either students or people who work around town. It is wonderful to see pastors come with some of their church members, or campus missionaries come with the students they are ministering to.

Interestingly, rather than increase or die out, the attendance has remained fairly constant. This has been a good thing in the sense that newer faces come in and replace the older ones. There are also a good number of consistent die-hards who just never miss. Though the number is still good (about 70 people per Forum), one reason for the fact that it doesn't grow considerably might be that many who have been once exposed to the truths of God's word, especially in systematised form, soon feel as if there is nothing more to learn and so find no use for such Forums. May God make us all humble enough to not be satisfied with a superficial understanding of His Word.

Apart from Ronald Kalifungwa, who has attended from Zambia, there are a number of other notable preachers who have been at the forum. These include men like Geoffrey Thomas from Wales (who has preached in conferences like Ligonier and Banner of Truth), Oliver Allmand-Smith from England, Stephen Turner from New Zealand, among others. These three that have been mentioned are among those scheduled to be at the Meaty Forum this year as well. This is not to say that these men have something esoteric to contribute to the discussions at the Meaty Forum. Of course they have the same Bibles as we do, and say the same things that would have been said by faithful students of God's word anywhere. Nevertheless, it is always interesting to hear how Biblical principles find application in various societies. For example, it was particularly refreshing to hear from Martin Grubb that the challenges faced by courting people in Manchester, England, are not very far removed from those faced by courting people here in Kenya.

The prayer of the organisers, and the local church in which the Forum is based (Trinity Baptist Church, Donholm) is that God would use the Forum to strengthen His church through His word, and make the gospel heard by many who haven't heard it yet. Will you join them in this prayer? Also, do invite someone to the Meaty Forum this year. That invite may just be what God uses to impact them lastingly. The Forum resumes on the second Friday of February, 2015.

A REPORT OF THE HIGH SCHOOL CAMP 2014

Dominic K. Ndung'u

The apostle Paul in *Colossians 4:5* gave a command to the Colossian church which we are also bound by, and that command is that we must '*redeem*' the time. The essence of this command, is that we must not only grasp opportunities to preach the gospel, but we must take it upon ourselves to create such opportunities. The High School's Camp 2014, was such an opportunity that we as Trinity Baptist Church, created as one of the means by which we can use to spread the message of the gospel.

The High School's Camp is an annual 4 day event held in the December holidays. We host a number of young people from TBC affiliated churches, with the purpose of teaching them from the bible, as well as giving them an opportunity to fellowship and interact. We accomplish this by having a programme that has sessions for Bible exposition as well as extracurricular activities.

This year's Camp was held from the 28 November to 2 December 2014 at the church's premises in Donholm. We are thankful to the Lord for the 52 participants who came from 21 different churches. It is also important to note the diversity of the participants by acknowledging the counties that they came from i.e. *Bungoma (3), Busia (2), Kericho (1), Kitui(2), Kwale (3), Makueni (7), Marsabit (7), Meru (3), Migori (5), Nairobi (12), Siaya (1), Tana River (1) and West Pokot (3).*

We consider the Camp to be a success because the Word of God was generously and faithfully presented to the participants. Everything that was done in and around the Camp, was to serve the end of God's word being preached to the participants. This was done through teaching sessions that occupied two thirds of the day's program. God was also pleased to make available to us men who were diligent and thorough in dividing the Word of God during the Camp.

This year's theme for the Camp was the '*Armour of God*' from Ephesians 6:11-18. This was a fitting theme that reminded the participants of the spiritual dangers that assail them and the resources God has for overcoming them. Such a topic is at the same time evangelistic, since it shows the alienation of the unbeliever from the protection that God gives to His children.

This was also relevant considering the distortions being peddled on this topic, especially in High schools. Such distortions result from the over spiritualization of things, where the devil is seen everywhere and in everything, and where bizarre means are used to 'cast him out'. Our intention was to counter such false teaching, and clear the confusion it has created, by approaching the topic from a purely scriptural basis.

We are also thankful to God for enabling us to handle all the supporting issues, like the logistics and accommodation that helped to make the Camp a success. It was a heavy task to coordinate the arrival and departures especially considering many of the participants were not acquainted with Nairobi. But we managed it thanks to the tireless work of many people who worked for the 4 days of the camp to ensure everything run smoothly.

In conclusion, it is important that we continue to pray that God may cause fruit to come from the Camp. May we also pray that He may grant us more opportunities, through which we may make known the gospel of His Son, Jesus Christ.

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gnmag@gmail.com

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P.O. Box 57907 00200 NAIROBI.

Chief Editor:

Keith Underhill

Editor:

John Muketha

Producer:

Ken Sakwa

Design & Printing:

Thelims Systems

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P.O. Box 57907 00200 NAIROBI.

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Cell Phone: 0728 431067 (for M-Pesa)

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You may send your questions, comments and compliments to:

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