

GRACE & TRUTH



PREACH THE GOSPEL

“Preach the word; be ready in
season and out of season”
(2 Timothy 4:2)



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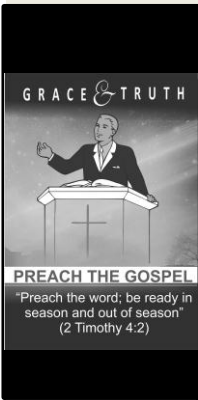
We welcome you to read and profit from ‘Grace & Truth’, a publication of Trinity Baptist Church, Nairobi. We believe there is a very great need for serious Biblical literature to be produced in our country of Kenya. We trust your soul will be fed and that you will be challenged from the Word of God.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

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GRACE & TRUTH

Magazine



Cover: Jesus declares “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15). And Paul adds, “Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season” (2 Timothy 4:2). It is through the preaching of the gospel that sinners come to faith in Christ and call on His name for salvation (Romans 10:13). “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17).

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

The risen Christ commands the eleven apostles, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation" (Mark 16:15). The great commission was the last which the Lord gave to His disciples before He was taken away from them. It was given to the apostles who represented the whole body of the believers. This therefore, is the great command to the church to preach the gospel to all creatures.

Preaching the gospel is the most important work on earth and the highest and glorious calling to which one can be called. Preaching is the communication of the truth of the word of God by man to man. Preaching is the God-appointed means of bringing sinners to Christ for salvation. Christ commands us to preach the gospel to every creature because it is the means by which the elect are to be gathered out from among the sons of men. "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" (Romans 10:13-15). The preacher is the person called and commissioned by Christ to undertake this noble task of bringing the good news to sinners.

The gospel which we are to preach to every creature is the great truth that "in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:19). God has, for our sake, made His Son to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). The heart of the gospel is Christ's death and resurrection on behalf of His people. He was delivered for our offences and rose again for our justification (Romans 4:25).

The preaching of the gospel is for all time, until Jesus Christ Himself shall come. As long as there is a church in the world, the obligation to preach the gospel will remain. Preaching is hard labour and the preacher of the gospel must take pains to prepare. Paul tells Timothy to, "devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching... Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Timothy 4:11-16). Wherever Christ is faithfully preached, God is honoured, and Christ is honoured.

The preacher of the gospel must own that gospel which he preaches. The preacher must have a personal experience of the saving work of Christ in order to be able to convince sinners of their need of a Saviour. This was true with Paul as he writes to the Thessalonians. “For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake” (1 Thessalonians 1:4-5). The preacher must realize that it is the Holy Spirit who convicts and convinces sinners thus causing them to turn to Christ. One reason why Christianity is not so aggressive and influential as it was in apostolic times is the feebleness of our faith in Christ as compared with the full assurance of faith exercised by the men of those days. The living force that should compel us is a bold reliance upon the power of the Holy Spirit, and a deep conviction of the might of the truth of God which we are to deliver.

Many preachers today offer a gospel that has been adulterated. The popular gospel today is the so-called ‘prosperity gospel’ which is no gospel at all. It is a man-centred religion which is primarily concerned with material well-being without touching the corrupt and desperately wicked heart. Paul pronounces a curse to anyone who preaches another gospel (Galatians 1:8-9). We must be faithful in preaching the gospel of Christ. Preaching the cross remains a stumbling block to many but it is still the power of God for salvation.

How are we to carry out this commission? The Lord tells us to, “pray the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest” (Matthew 9:38). We need to earnestly pray for God’s help that we can be effective preachers of the gospel. We must also pray for pastors and other servants of God engaged in preaching. We need to realize that God has called people to do His work and we must pray for each other. We pray to God to open more doors of opportunities for the advancement of the gospel in our land. We must also promote personal piety that results in personal effort.

“Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.” If you claim to be a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ, then question yourself: “What have I done to carry out my Master’s command?” Regrettably we have done so little in comparison with the sacrifice Christ made to secure our salvation. Let us spend, and be spent, to glorify His name among the sons of men. “But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24).

EPHESIANS 2:6-7

We are continuing with this great Biblical truth of salvation. It is our prayer that you will truly understand what salvation is according to the Scriptures. It is a common claim today, 'I am saved, Jesus Christ is my personal Saviour'. Yet so often it appears to be no more than words, for many such do not lead very different lives from non-Christians. For others salvation is baptism, or responding in a meeting by repeating 'the sinner's prayer', or by trusting the Lord to help in such earthly needs as sickness and poverty. And yet there is nothing more important than this subject; get this wrong and you are wrong for ever. There are eternal consequences. If at a crossroads you take the wrong route, the only solution is to return and take the right way. According to Ephesians 2:7 salvation can be properly understood when the spotlight is turned on God's **grace**. God has ONE great purpose in His work of salvation, to "show the immeasurable riches of his *grace* in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus". The following two things will show with noonday brightness that salvation is by **grace** and nothing else.

1. THE ONES WHO RECEIVE SALVATION

(1) *What are they given?*

They are given blessings far greater and far more than can be imagined! Not just life from spiritual death, but 'raised and seated us with Christ in the heavenly places'. What God has done to His Son by His immeasurable power (1:19-20), He has done also to those who are saved. Our Lord was not raised to continue His earthly ministry, but to begin a new heavenly ministry on our behalf. Don't think of the "heavenly places" as only where Christ is at the right hand of God, because we ourselves are now in those 'heavenly places'. Think of it as 'the kingdom of heaven', the rule of Christ over His people, so that now our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20), now we are indwelt by the Spirit from heaven, and now we are being led towards heaven. For more evidence look up Colossians 2:12, 3:1-4, Romans 6:4-5. We are pictured as "seated" implying the completion of work, rest, so security, and this for ever. It is something that will continue to show the grace of God throughout "the coming ages". Just as the public showing of a great painting shows the greatness of the painter, so our presence shows that we are a masterpiece of God's **grace**. And it is all "with Christ" our glorious Saviour and Lord. What more could you wish for? It is true now spiritually, and then in glory in our new resurrection body (Revelation 3:21).

(2) *Who are they?*

You would think anyone to whom such blessings are given must be very special people. But no, there is nothing in them. As with the Corinthians, it was not because they were powerful, or of noble birth, or wise (see 1 Corinthians 1:26ff.). Paul has already clearly written that they deserve no blessing, but only wrath and condemnation.

- They were ‘dead’ – unable to do anything spiritually good, only able to live a life of walking in sin. It is only by the **grace** of God that they are made spiritually alive (2:5).
- They were ‘slaves’ – unable to free themselves, willing slaves of the world, the devil and the flesh. The response of God is His **grace** in setting them free from the world into the “heavenly places”, to sit with Christ where all things are under His feet, including the devil (1:22).

Every need of ours before God is fully answered; nothing is lacking for eternity. We do not contribute anything towards our salvation; we only have things from which we need to be saved. Everything is only “in Christ Jesus”, that is, because of Him and by being united to Him. So if it is not what we deserve, and it is nothing we deserve but what He has done for us, then it is pure **grace**. It is called “kindness” (2:7), as this is grace in action (see 4:32), His giving His Son for us. God deals with us exactly as with His glorious, eternal and sinless Son! We owe Him absolutely everything. To His name be the glory!

2. THE ONE WHO GIVES SALVATION

We are seeking to clearly show how true salvation is by “the immeasurable riches of His **grace**”. The largeness of a gift is not simply the amount, but also what it cost the giver. This is why Jesus said that the widow “put in more” than all the rich, for she “put in all she had to live on” (Luke 21:1-4). We are going to tread on very holy ground in order to think of these “immeasurable riches”.

(1) *What did it cost the Father?* Everything!

God made the world “very good”. It was spoiled by Satan who tempted and deceived the first couple to disobey God. Why didn’t God just start all over again? That would have been to admit that He had failed, that Satan had been victorious. It is true that Adam and Eve deserved eternal death, but God determined to save a people for Himself and to rescue creation. But sin had to be paid for; God’s justice had to be satisfied. Who would be able to defeat Satan? How will God get a people who will be genuinely obedient to Him? This was God’s answer – ‘I will send my own Son, my only Son, and so my beloved Son’ (see Luke 20:13). On a human level, think of what is cost Abraham to agree to sacrifice his only and beloved son Isaac (Genesis 22:2).

We can hardly begin to understand, but the Bible often emphasizes that Jesus is the “only” Son (John 1:14, 3:16,18, 1 John 4:9). There is a relationship of perfect love and harmony between the Father and the Son (John 15:9, 17:24); Jesus Himself is called “beloved”, that is, specially loved by the Father (Matthew 3:17, 17:5, Ephesians 1:6). Nonetheless, God sent Him forth (Galatians 4:4), gave Him (John 3:16), did not spare Him (Romans 8:32), made Him to be sin and so treated Him as if the foulest sinner (2 Corinthians 5:21), and turned His back from Him when He was dying on the cross. Here is completeness in giving, holding nothing back, because all was necessary for our salvation.

(2) *What did it cost the Son*? Everything!

The Son eternally dwelt in glory with the Father and the Spirit, incessantly adored, and worthy of all praise. Yet He was willing to leave all behind for our sakes, to ‘make Himself nothing’ (= to give up His reputation), and to humble Himself even to death on the cursed cross (Philippians 2:6-8). Think of what it cost Him to just come into this sinful world. If your soul is pained by what you see and hear, what about His sinless soul? Then “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree” (1 Peter 2:24), and suffered accordingly. This is immeasurable love, and because it is shown to those who are only worthy of condemnation, it is pure **grace**.

Questions

1. Is your view of salvation one of **grace**? Do you confess that it is the grace of God alone from beginning to end? Throughout eternity the presence of saved sinners in heaven will be the indisputable evidence that God is the God of ‘immeasurably rich **grace**’. This is His purpose and His great glory.
 2. Have you been saved by **grace**? Have you consciously rejected anything you have done or promise that you might do? Is your only hope rather in God and what He has done in Christ and Him crucified? I ask you now: ‘Why should God let you enter His holy dwelling?’ What is your answer? ‘I did my best, although I know I am not perfect; I went to church; I read my Bible and prayed?’ No! No! Point to the Lamb slain and cast your crown at His feet, for He alone is worthy.
 3. Are you constantly glorifying God for His **grace**? Because it is ‘immeasurably rich’ there is no end to its glory. It is the theme of heaven: “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” (Revelation 7:10), because God has made them “white in the blood of the Lamb” (7:14).
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PRESERVATION & PERSEVERANCE (1 Samuel 18-29)

Although David had been anointed king by the command of God, he had to undergo years of continual suffering in order to put his faith in the Lord to the test. Many sins in him were uncovered, so revealing the reality of indwelling sin in the believer. Such suffering humbles our pride, gets rid of self-dependence, and renews our desire after holiness in every aspect of our lives because it shows that we have not ‘arrived’. In the true Christian trials of suffering not only reveal the sin that still indwells, but also the work of the God’s grace to produce the pure gold of Christian profession. So it was with David and his suffering.

1. A TRUE CHRISTIAN PERSEVERES THROUGH SUFFERING

It is our responsibility to persevere in the faith until the end (Matthew 13:21, 24:13). There will not only be failures, but also victories, important areas of faithfulness to the Lord, the real evidence of the work of God’s grace. Consider the following aspects of David’s perseverance.

(1) David’s longing for the Lord’s presence and guidance.

There were times when David seemed to forget the Lord and to act on impulse, as when he fled to the Philistines. But note the following –

- ✓ David fled from Saul to Samuel, God’s prophet, after he sought to kill him (1 Samuel 19:18).
- ✓ David obeyed God’s word through the prophet Gad as to where he should go (22:5).
- ✓ David went to the High priest, Ahimelech, to inquire of God for him, as he had many times previously (22:15).
- ✓ David earnestly and repeatedly sought God’s will concerning what he should do about the situation in Keilah (23:1-12)
- ✓ David’s greatest sorrow was that he was driven from God’s heritage by Saul (26:19), the temple worship. His inheritance in Canaan, and God’s people.
- ✓ David inquired of the Lord what to do after the death of Saul, instead of trying to work things out himself (2 Samuel 2:1).

What better thing for a man of God to do than to flee to God’s people in time of difficulty, especially to the spiritual leaders? This is what you will do eventually if you are concerned about the will of God. Is this characteristic of God’s professing people today? Or is there a fear of what the word of God will say?

(2) David's continual joy in the Lord.

There were times when David seemed so discouraged that he was without hope (see 23:15, 27:1). But a Psalm such as 56 is one that reveals his triumphant faith in the Lord (see vv. 3-4,10-11). David was not one who was bitter against God in his sufferings. In the same way a child who has been disciplined runs into the arms of the one who spanked him, so David ran back to God! What is your attitude to God in times of difficulty? Are you drawn to Him? Or are you full of complaint and bitterness? Do you say, 'Why me?' and 'It is more than I can bear'? Or do you rejoice in the sure victory to come (as in Psalm 56:9,13)?

(3) David's attitude towards Saul his persecutor.

There was a time when David so foolishly and sinfully vowed to wreak revenge on Nabal (1 Samuel 25). But as regards Saul, David even refused to kill him when it was twice in his hands to do so (chs. 24, 26). David refused to reason that providence revealed the will of God, as his men encouraged him to think (24:4, 26:8). Like Christ, he left judgement to God (25:39, 26:10, 1 Peter 2:23). He would not try to fulfil God's promises by taking advantage of the situation. Rather he saw himself as having a plain Biblical duty towards the Lord's anointed, to preserve a respectful and humble attitude (24:11 calling him "my father", 26:17-19). He even had a bad conscience for cutting off a piece of Saul's robe (24:5-6). Are you as patient as David in your sufferings? Is your heart committed to doing the will of God, even if that seems to prolong your own sufferings? This is the attitude in the heart of the Christian (as Philippians 4:11-13). And you must continue in this way until the end, the final victory.

2. GOD PRESERVES A TRUE CHRISTIAN IN SUFFERING

God has not promised to keep us from suffering, but to be with us and bring us through suffering (e.g. Isaiah 43:1-2). Look at the amazing way God both protected and prospered David when he feared for his life.

- ✓ Three times David evaded Saul's strong, accurate spear throw designed to 'pin him to the wall' (18:11, 19:10).
- ✓ He was protected from the Philistines he had to fight in order to get Saul's daughters (18:17-27).
- ✓ When Saul commanded David's death, Jonathan, Saul's very own son, "delighted much in David" and spoke well of David to Saul (19:1-8).
- ✓ Michal saved David from her father Saul's messengers who came to kill him, by letting him down through the window (19:11-12).
- ✓ When messengers from Saul came to get hold of David at Ramah they "prophesied", and even Saul himself "prophesied" (19:18-24).

- ✓ David's playing the madman before Achish, because of the suspicion of his servants, worked and David was sent away from the Philistines (21:10-15).
- ✓ God brought Abiathar to him, with the ephod and Urim and Thummim (22:20-23).
- ✓ God daily protected him from the hand of Saul while he was holed up in the strongholds in the wilderness of Ziph (23:14).
- ✓ Saul was called away from pursuing David when he was just about to overtake him, with only a mountain separating them (23:25-28).
- ✓ God stirred up Abigail to stop David from sinful revenge against her husband Nabal (25:32-34).
- ✓ The suspicion of some of the Philistine commanders got David sent away from the ensuing battle with Saul (29:1-11).

After these things David ought to have had no doubt of the Lord's keeping power. God even kept him when he made sinful choices. He provided all that David needed. We might say that all earth and hell joined together to kill David, but it could not succeed, because of God's promises to David concerning the kingdom and the coming Redeemer. The Lord knows how to rescue His people (2 Peter 2:9)! Go forth in confidence in the Lord to obey Him at whatever cost. He has given you Christ, and so in Him you have all things. Persevere because God will surely preserve you, although you might not see how He can possibly do it. You might not be able to see the end of the dark tunnel, but it is there, and you must walk by faith. If you are not yet a Christian and you are afraid to become one because you fear you would not be able to persevere, look at the God we urge you to trust. In His grace He has first given His Son when we were His enemies living in sin. Now if He is able bring you from darkness to light, He is surely able to keep you! His purposes and promises cannot fail. There is a glorious inheritance for the people of God, but only obtainable to those who trust in Christ as their Saviour and repent of their sins to God.

But the one who endures to the end will be saved (Matthew 10:22, 24:13)

... who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:8)

And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope (Hebrews 3:6)

For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end (Hebrew 3:14)

... to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Peter 1:4-5)

CHURCH MEMBERS – What Is Their Primary Duty?

Murungi Igweta

One of the tragedies of the church today is that the concept of church membership has been lost by too many churches. In this article I do not intend to defend the biblical position of formal church membership for it is obvious; my purpose is to show you the practical need for church membership.

What is your membership responsibility in your local church? In one word, members are to LOVE. Love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul and mind, and your neighbour as yourself. The Lord said:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:37-40, see also Deuteronomy 6:5, Mark 12:30, Luke 10:27).

1. LOVE GOD

To love the Lord God is both the duty and delight of every believer. God has shown so much love to Christians that they cannot do anything but love Him. *"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends"* (Jn. 15:13). Jesus has shown His redeeming love. Therefore, 'redeeming love should be the theme of our song' until we die. You cannot afford to fail to love God because the Bible pronounces a curse on anyone who fails in this. *"If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed!"* (1 Corinthians 16:22). So what is expected in loving the Lord our God?

a. Negatively

(1) **Hate sin.** God is holy (Joshua 24:19); there is none holy like the Lord (1 Samuel 2:2); Our Holy God shows Himself holy in righteousness (Isaiah 5:16). Habakkuk nails it when he says, *"You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong, why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?"* (Habakkuk 1:13). For this reason, we who are called by His name must be holy (1 Peter 1:16), and hate sin by killing it (Roman 8:13).

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you; sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming ... But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off, the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator (Colossians 3:5,6,8-10).

(2) **Hate the world.** Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him (1 John 2:15). We have no abiding city in the world, and so we must live as pilgrims do. That is, we must not be too attached to this world or the things of this world. After all, they are transient. Be dead to the world. Your heart must not be stained by any worldliness. But why should we take this serious step in our relation to the world? You should realize that our hearts are too narrow to contain both loves. The human heart is more likely to be worldly than to be godly. The way to demonstrate your love of the world is by giving yourself to spiritual things. Unless your heart loves the Word of God and spends time listening to it, reading it, studying, memorizing, meditating and applying it, you are still in love with the world. Pray every day. Spend time with believers in Christian fellowship.

b. Positively

Love Christ. God loved us so much that He gave His only Son (John 3:16). The Lord Jesus Christ loved us so much that He gave His life as the propitiation for our sins (1 John 2:2). He is our Advocate with the Father. He died our death. He took our curse gave us His righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21). How can we fail to love Him? It is expected that we love Christ and live to serve Him. *Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible* (Ephesians 6:24). You love Christ by knowing and doing His Word. This is how Christians become Christ-like. You love Christ by loving His church for which He gave His life. True believers are part of a local church themselves, and this is how they demonstrate that they are part of body of Christ. Christians are commanded not to neglect to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as we see the Day drawing near (Hebrews 10:25). Christians gather on Sunday, the Lord's Day for worship and fellowship. In this way the fourth Commandment is fulfilled.

2. LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR

a. Love fellow Christians

(1) **Love for their Pastors.** Christ has appointed that His church be orderly. There are men whom He has provided for the leadership of the church. These men shepherd the flock of God which the Holy Spirit appointed them overseers to care for the church of God which He bought with His own blood (Acts 20:28). How are you to show that you love those that Christ has given to lead in the local church where you are a member?

- Submit to them (Hebrews 13:17). The church has a responsibility to listen and obey the pastors. Listen attentively to what they teach and seek to practice it. The authority of the pastors is in the Word of God that they teach. When you seek their counsel (you should avail yourself this privilege), you should do as they recommend. The Bible teaches this truth in various passages:

We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labour among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. (1Thessalonians 5:12-13)

Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. (Hebrews 13:7)

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. (Hebrews 13:17)

- Pray for them (Colossians 4:3, 1 Thessalonians 5:25, 2 Thessalonians 3:1, Hebrews 13:18). You should pray for your pastor to be a godly, faithful preacher and shepherd of the flock. Pray that he may not be slothful in zeal but be fervent in spirit serving the Lord. Pray that he would grow in discernment so that he may not lead the church into error. Pray that the Lord may open doors of ministry for the Word to go forth through them. Pray that they will not be discouraged.
- Financially support them (1 Corinthians 9:2-14, 1 Timothy 5:17). While every pastor may not necessarily be financially supported, yet the church should always desire to meet the general principle that the labourer is worthy his wages. Pastors are usually poorly remunerated, not because people don't have means but because they do not highly value the work that they do. Yet it is the pastor who will bring them the gospel, by which they are saved (salvation is the greatest and highest blessing ever!). It is the pastor who will counsel them in godliness, and usually this counsel is invaluable. It is the pastor who visits when they are sick, when they marry, when they have a baby. It is the pastor to baptize them. And the pastor is there even to bury them when they die!

(2) *Love for their brethren.*

- We are to love with a fervent love those upon whom the heavenly Father has cast His electing love. Love with a sincere heart those that Christ has redeemed by His blood. May you show brotherly affection to all those who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. What does this love look like?
- *We are our brother's keeper.* It is our duty to watch their backs so that the enemy, the devil does not attack them. He is compared to a roaring lion prowling around looking for someone to devour. We should be on the lookout to help them differentiate wolves from their fellow sheep.
- *The 'one-anothering' ministry.* The Bible has a lot to say on how we are to relate with each other. Some of the phrases show that ours is a very close relationship. There are many passages that have this kind of exhortation. Jesus said, "Be at peace with one another" (Matthew 9:50) and "Love one another" (John 13:34, 35; 15:12,17). Paul wrote, "Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honour" (Romans 12:10). We are to live in harmony with one another (Romans 12:16, 15:5); to welcome one another as Christ has welcomed us, for the glory of God (Romans 15:17). We are to instruct one another (Romans 15:14), greet one another with a holy kiss (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12); and wait for one another (1 Corinthians 11:33). Members are commanded to have the same care for one another (1 Corinthians 12:25). Brothers are to comfort one another, and to agree with one another (2 Corinthians 13:11).

- We are encouraged through love to serve one another (Galatians 5:13) and to bear with one another's burden and so fulfil the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2; c.f. Ephesians 4:2). At the time we are warned against and discouraged from biting and devouring one another or consuming one another (Galatians 5:15). We are to desist from provoking or envying one another (Galatians 5:26). Neither are we to bear false witness nor are we to lie to one another (Colossians 3:9). Instead, we are to be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave us (Ephesians 4:32).
- Moreover, we are to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (Ephesians 5:21). We are to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom (Colossians 3:16). We are urged to abound in love for one another and for all (2 Thessalonians 3:12). Besides, we are to encourage one another (1 Thessalonians 4:18; 5:11; Hebrews 10:25) and do good to one another and to everyone (1 Thessalonians 5:15).
- We are to exhort one another every day (Hebrews 3:13) and to consider how to stir up one another to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24). It is also the will of God for us to confess our sins to one another and pray for one another (James 5:16). We are to show hospitality to one another without grumbling (1 Peter 4:9). Let us also remember to clothe ourselves with humility toward one another (1 Peter 5:5) and to have fellowship with one another (1 John 1:7).

b. Love unbelievers

(1) *Set an example of godliness.* Christ expects us to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. The way we show that we belong to Christ is by living in this world as He did. Our conduct must show that we do not belong to this wicked world of sin, but that we are citizens of the kingdom of God where righteousness dwells. A godly example for a Christian is the best platform for preaching the gospel. Unless one has the moral authority established on the principle of being above reproach, honest, godly, peaceable, loving, respectful and a man of integrity, the possibility of your faith being taken seriously is very low. How you live can either endear sinners to the cross of Calvary or repulse them. While we should endeavour to be as perfect as our heavenly Father is, yet we should realize that we do have flaws. The difference between us and the world is that we are willing to accept responsibility for our failures, confess our sins and even bear the brunt of our shortcomings while the unbelievers will try to hide.

(2) *Preach the gospel.* While our conduct is vital in representing Christ as His ambassadors, unbelievers are unable to see them. This is why we should bring the gospel in words and in a way that they can understand. As witnesses of Christ we should be prepared to give an account for the hope we have. We must not get tired of telling the world of Christ and of His saving grace. We should constantly urge them to believe in Christ and repent of their sins.

COMMON QUESTION NO. 10

MUST CHRISTIANS OBEY THE 4TH. COMMANDMENT?

Keith Underhill

There are those who think that the commandment, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy”, was only for Old Testament times (Exodus 20:8-11, Deuteronomy 5:12-15). They believe that the Sabbath has been fulfilled in Christ because it is a ceremonial and not a moral law. Some even falsely say that it is not repeated in the New Testament! Others teach, ‘We are in the new covenant so we are not under the law’ (Romans 6:14). Is this true, or is the Sabbath commandment to be kept today just as much as “You shall not kill”?

1. There is a day which is called the Lord’s Day (Revelation 1:10). This is a day belonging to the Lord and is to be identified with the first day of the week, Sunday, the day on which our Lord rose from the dead. Therefore, to make Romans 14:5-6 teach that there are no special days at all is clearly false.

2. The Sabbath commandment *is* repeated many times by our Lord! He faced continual opposition from the religious leaders over how the Sabbath should be kept (John 5:18), but nowhere did Jesus even suggest that He has come to do away with the Sabbath. He gives the true intention of the Sabbath: “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27-28). He answers His own question in the affirmative: “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill,” by healing the man with a withered hand (Mark 3:4-5). Jesus specifically taught that He had not come to abolish the Law, that not even the least commandment should be relaxed, and that the righteousness in His kingdom must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 5:17-20). We conclude that in the teaching of Jesus the 4th commandment must continue to be obeyed, but according to His authoritative interpretation and not according to the teaching of the Pharisees.

3. The Sabbath is one of the Ten Commandments. Everything surrounding the giving of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai marks them out as very special. They were written with the very finger of God Himself, and on durable tablets of stone (Exodus 31:18, Deuteronomy 9:10). These were to be kept inside the ark of the covenant (Deuteronomy 10:1-5). The Ten Words, as they are sometimes called, are even called the covenant itself (Deuteronomy 9:9,11), as they summarize all of God’s demands on His people. This is why John Calvin, when he wrote his commentary on the first 5 books of the Bible, sought to explain every law under one of the Ten Commandments. Therefore

the Sabbath may not be dismissed as a ‘ceremonial law’, nor can it be subtracted to leave just 9. The very number 10 speaks of completeness, a unity. The 4th Commandment stands or falls with the other 9.

4. The Sabbath is a ‘Creation ordinance’. More significant again is the fact that “God blessed the seventh day and made it holy” at creation (Genesis 2:2-3). It is true that there is no actual command given at this time, but God’s seventh-day rest is the pattern for ours (Exodus 20:11). The clear implication is that from the beginning of the world, even before sin entered in man was to set aside one day in 7 for the Lord. All of the Ten Commandments were in force before the giving of the law in Exodus 20 (specifically for the 4th Commandment see Exodus 16:22-26). The Sabbath is as essential to human life as is work and marriage, the other 2 creation ordinances (see Genesis 2:15 and 24).

5. Isaiah looks forward to a true Sabbath being celebrated (Isaiah 58:13-14). Here are spiritual principles together with spiritual promises. It is so important to call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honourable. This should not be dismissed as if being in Old Testament means it is irrelevant to us. Then we would have to discard the whole Old Testament as just having antiquarian interest.

6. There remains a Sabbath (Hebrews 4:9). The ESV has translated *sabbatismos* as ‘sabbath rest’ yet the word for rest that is used 11 times in 3:11-4:11 is not here. Note that rest is ‘God’s’ rest, His rest of the seventh day (4:4). The reason for a sabbath remaining is in 4:10, which is literally translated, ‘for the one having entered His (i.e. God’s) rest has also himself rested from his works...’ This is a reference to Christ who has completed His work of the new creation and sits at God’s right hand. And it is those who believe in Christ who also are entering God’s rest (4:3). For such believers as ourselves, “there remains a Sabbath (observance)...”.

7. Objection. Does not Colossians 2:16-17 that the Sabbath is but a shadow, fulfilled in Christ like the new moon? There were a number of other Sabbath days under Old Testament religion, for example in the 7th month (Leviticus 23:24,32,39, see plural in v. 38). ‘Sabbath’ in Colossians 2:16 it is actually an indefinite plural in form – Sabbaths. With all the other evidence above it is a weak foundation on which to build a case for the demolition of the weekly Sabbath, when it could refer to the Sabbaths of the ceremonial law that were in dispute (together with festivals and new moons).

8. Question. How do we know the observance of the day was changed from the 7th to the 1st day of the week? There is no specific command given. There is the following evidence:

- Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week (John 20:1) and all subsequent resurrection appearances, where the day is noted, are on the first day of the week (20:19,26, Luke 24:13-49). The first day of the week is the completion of redemption (the new creation) as the seventh day is the completion of the first creation.
- The Christians in Corinth were instructed to put something aside “on the first day of every week” (1 Corinthians 16:2) as Paul had also directed the churches of Galatia (v. 1).
- Paul remained in Troas 7 days so that he could gather together to “break bread” with the Christians there, implying that the first day of the week was when they met together (Acts 20:6-7).
- Although it is recorded that Paul did go to the synagogue on the Jewish Sabbath (seventh-day) (see Acts 13:14, 17:2) it was to preach the gospel and not to worship as a Christian. There is no evidence that Christians worshipped Jesus as Lord in the synagogue services. They met initially in the temple just as a place where they could gather, and in their homes (2:46, 3:1, 5:42, Romans 16:5, etc.).

9. How then should we regard Sunday? What does it mean to keep the Sabbath day holy under the new covenant? Why is there such opposition as if keeping commandments is legalism? It is the very mark of one who knows God (1 John 2:4)! What a privilege to set apart one day in seven, as we anticipate glory and an eternal Sabbath. To keep it holy is to set it apart as different from the other days of the week, doing what I really love to do as a Christian, giving myself to worship, fellowship and service of the Lord who gave Himself for me. If the heavenly glory is a glorious Sabbath, may the present weekly Sabbaths be a foretaste of heaven on earth!

A heart that loves the Lord will leap for joy at the prospect of a day with Him. Doesn't a child love to have a day with his father? Of course the worldly will loathe giving any time to God. The self-absorbed will regret any day spent in His presence. Without love for God such a requirement will seem narrow and a heavy burden. But for the godly it is a broad road of liberty and joy. There is an entire day each week liberated from my ordinary recreations and labours to serve the lover of my soul and to be with Him. Quoted from Walter J. Chantry in *Bruce Ray, Celebrating the Sabbath*, p. 6.

THERE IS DEATH IN THE POT!

A CRITICAL LOOK AT TODAY'S 'GOSPEL'

Elly Achok

The story in 2 Kings 4:38-41 is quite fascinating. There is a famine in the land. Elisha asks the men to make some food for the prophets to eat. Some fellows go out and gather wild herbs and apparently bring with them poisonous leaves. When the food is ready, the Prophets taste of the food which was to be eaten by many and sense that in it there was death, at which point they ran to Elisha the prophet with this terrified cry, "O man of God, there is death in the pot!"

I shall use this text not so much for its theological teaching as for its illustrative value. Imagine for a moment what would happen had the people eaten from the poisoned pot? Mass death is what would have occurred. However think of it in another way, what was in the pot was food in the large part. The poison was a small percentage of it, yet the cry was, "There is death in the pot!" A mere drop of poison would turn a whole barrel into a barrel of poison.

I suggest we have a similar problem today and someone had better cry out, "There is death in the pot!" The pot in this context is the word of God, the gospel ministry. It is the pot from which the world must eat the bread of heaven, the wells from which living waters must be served for the healing of the many. But there is death in that pot, poison in that well. This series of articles will be that cry of the children of the prophets, "There is death in the pot!"

PART I: WHATEVER IT IS, DON'T CALL IT 'GOSPEL'!

THE MESSENGER FORGOT THE MESSAGE!

In the age where messages were hand delivered by persons who ran fastest a story is told of an ancient kingdom which had excellent messengers. They could carry the message of the king with the fastest speeds and bring the feedback in record time. One day the king sent one of his top runners to bring back a message from another king. The top gun, with characteristic speed flew off, and within no time came back to his sovereign, panting out of breath. Kneeling before his king, the monarch looked expectantly at the messenger, eager to hear what his counterpart had said. There was a blank stare on the messenger's face, as he had forgotten the message he had been sent to deliver! He ran with speed, made good time, but appeared before his sovereign without the message. Preachers and preaching these days share this fate in large part. In the pursuit of speed (church growth, fame, modernization, adaptations and mutations), preachers and preaching have lost the message of the King – the gospel.

Preachers have long abdicated their primary mandate as proclaimers of the revealed word, and have wandered into vain jangling. The result? From the hallowed pulpits there has ceased the declaration of that which is “the power of God for salvation” – the gospel, and instead we are left with weak presentations that can be anything but the gospel. The salt has lost its taste and is good for nothing but to be trampled under people’s feet. Deterioration of religion and weakening of the Christian Church and its prophetic voice in society is a direct result of this abdication. So what can we make of what passes for preaching and Christian ministry these days in many pulpits? I have some thoughts in this regard, and I will present them in 3 parts. In this first part I shall attempt to explain that what we see is not gospel preaching but some other kind of speech.

PHILOSOPHERS AND WISE MEN

These types of preachers are excellent thinkers. They have uncanny abilities to figure out issues of life and can frame them in ways which appear incontrovertible. What they say has little if anything to do with the scriptures but it is sensible and quite practical. There was even an American television preacher who named his TV program, "the Common Sense approach". These would be more at home with Aristotle and Socrates than they would be with Paul and Isaiah. The trap in this sort of preaching is that it bases its philosophy on misinterpreted texts of scripture. Here is an example and the reader must be keen to discern the subtlety in these systems. T.D. Jakes, who was once featured on the coveted cover of Time magazine which posed the question “Is he the next Billy Graham?”, preached in a service attended and praised by the new age guru Oprah Winfrey. In his message Jakes was explaining why one’s past struggles and deficiencies are the drivers of one’s future greatness. He eloquently taught on how to harness your past experiences into a formidable force for your success. Now as far as the wisdom and eloquence of the message went, one could hardly resist the force of Jake's logic. To some very extent even what he was saying was very true and very much applicable in situations of life. Many have been known to extract greatness from places of pain. So one might ask, if it may be true and applicable, why find fault with it? And my answer is quite simple and to the point – it is not the gospel, and as long as Jakes identifies himself as a gospel preacher we must charge him with abdication, with forgetting the message.

IT MAY NOT BE A BAD THING, ALL WE ARE SAYING IS THAT IT IS NOT THE GOSPEL

I had a conversation with my theology class in which we were remarking just how solemn and fearful the gospel ministry is. So solemn, that when Paul speaks to young Timothy about it, he literally brings him under oath with these words: “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach

the word...” (2 Timothy 4:1-2). When the Judaizers came with a mongrel message to Galatia, Paul was as scathing as he was vehement as he exclaimed, ‘let them be accursed’. And the reason? They preach “another gospel”. The sanctity and solemnity of the gospel is such that it can neither be substituted nor mixed with anything else. Even what ordinarily appears good, when mixed with the gospel makes it become another gospel.

Here is an illustration to help us grasp the point I am making. A scientist who, after his laboratory tests, concludes that the kind of mosquito which transmits malaria is a female kind called *Anopheles* is truthful and even helpful, but such information cannot be classified as the ‘gospel’. We are saying wisdom is good, and more information on many things is helpful, BUT IT IS NEVER THE GOSPEL. As such those things have no place on the sacred pulpit and do not form part of the gospel preacher’s mandate.

NOTHING BUT THE GOSPEL

In 1 Corinthians 2:2 Paul contends that when he went to Corinth he determined to know nothing “except Jesus Christ and him crucified”. When he had preached on Christ and the resurrection in Athens (Acts 17), the Greek philosophers concluded Paul and Barnabas had simply brought newer wisdom. We are told these Greeks gathered at market places just to hear some new teaching. Yet Paul was clear that he was not called to add on to the world’s knowledge about nature, and new ways of understanding. Paul was clear that he was called to preach that wisdom which is foolishness to those who perish but to those being saved God’s very power that saves (1 Corinthians 1:18).

The reason I know men of our day have abdicated the gospel, is people of the world like Oprah Winfrey, movie stars and athletes, find these other messages very sensible and quite relevant to their careers and pursuits. We are not saying that these sorts of messages are bad in and of themselves. Rather what we are pointing out is that it is not the province of the gospel preacher. So Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:15-16 declares the necessity which has been placed on him and cries, "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!"

In Colossae Paul likely deals with this type of intrusion in Christian preaching. Although we do not know all the details about this heresy, Paul’s charge in Colossians 2:8-13 makes clear that at the very least it (1) denied that all of God dwelt bodily in Christ Jesus (2:9), (2) denied that the Christian was complete in Christ (2:10), as if he needed more than just Christ, and (3) tried to supplement the freedom in Christ by introducing ways of heightening Christian spirituality. An implication we may surmise from Paul’s attack of this heresy is that it was making a very compelling case in the minds of the people, and was winning hearts at Colossae.

It is clear that this charge of heresy was predicated upon plausible wisdom and philosophy and hence Paul’s admonition in 2:8:

See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

It was an error which suggested diverse wisdom and new knowledge which was super imposed on the Christian gospel. These Paul describes in 2:15-17 as philosophies and traditions which are not according to Christ. It may have worked for them outside of Christ but Paul was jealous that such wisdom is neither confused with the gospel nor mixed with it.

So the gospel preacher is not a wise man according to this world, nor a philosopher and thinker who seeks to bring earthly solutions to earthly problems.

LIFE COACHES AND MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKERS

Most of the so called successful preachers who rule our airwaves and shape Christian thought fall in this category: Joel Osteen, Joyce Meyer, T.D. Jakes – the list is too long to put to paper. The rate at which social, medical and financial experts are invited on 'gospel' TV programs and now even in church pulpits says a lot about the view of preaching and gospel ministry in our days. I once went to a church which called itself, "Life Skills Ministries International". When Mavuno Church took Kenya by storm, it trended with a new approach which turned home cell fellowships into career hubs. People congregated in the home churches not according to geographical locations but according to their careers so that those home cells would in effect be mentorship hubs for career development. This same Church hit national headlines when it boldly displayed billboards and TV adverts of near nudity in an effort to teach 'sex education among youths'.

Our generation want fixes for this life's problems, and have little thought if any for the afterlife. This is the demand and 'smart fellows' simply make the supply to complete the chain. It is the age of felt needs, utilitarianism and consumerism.

In the Gospel of John chapter 6, after the feeding of the 5,000, the crowds go looking for Jesus. When they finally find him they remark how hard they have sought for Him. The Lord's reply was telling: "*Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves*" (v.26). What the Lord was saying could very well be said about today's preaching of felt needs. The focus is not God and the future of our souls but on man and how he can do better in the here and now. That is when the Lord make the strong remark, "*Do not labour for the food that perishes*". (v.27). The majority of popular preaching is aimed at helping people live more prosperous lives now, to reach their potential, and to manage their lives for greater productivity in the things of this world. The preacher is therefore a motivator and a life coach. Popular messages are those which drive this

earthly agenda and the rich and famous preachers consequently are those who are on the cutting edge of this 'technology'.

In Kenya there is a man whose fame is growing in equal measure as his fortune. Dr. Wale Akinyemi is a regular face on our TV, helping people deal with life's issues. In the last election he was contracted by the electoral commission to help them deal with internal problems and stress arising from the highly charged election. Now I wouldn't make reference to Dr. Wale had he been just another banker, conflict management expert, a UN guy or some other professional. I mention him because he was a preacher I knew back in Mombasa, and I saw him make the transition from the pulpit to what he would now call 'the market place'. It was as easy as fitting into a shoe, and that is my point. Preaching and life coaching seem very similar today. Now I say there is nothing wrong with helping people achieve their life's goals or reaching their potential (whatever that means). My contention is three fold?

- 1) Such enterprises must not be confused with the gospel because they are not.
- 2) Practitioners of these sorts of ministries must not be called 'gospel preachers'. Let's find genuine names for them. In the secular world they are called life coaches, motivational speakers, financial advisers, relationships counsellors and so on. These names are not sinful; they are apt in describing what they truly do. But I feel to call them gospel preachers is a devaluation, even a misuse of that appellation.
- 3) Such endeavors must not be practiced from the Christian pulpit. As there is a time and a place for every activity under the sun, there is a time and a place for God's people to seek these other services, if they should feel they have need for them. We must insist that the pulpit is exclusively for the preaching of the gospel (1 Corinthians 2:2), not imparting business skills and advice for life. Such can be dispensed in schools of economics and wellness centres.

I believe this obfuscation to be deadly for the integrity of the Gospel and quite harmful to the eternal souls of people.

ENTERTAINERS AND PERFORMERS

We are in the age of super star preachers and mega churches. There are reliable reports that preachers and churches are now engaging professional brand managers and image consultants to manage their appearances and public profiles. Would Paul rise from the dead! Would Jeremiah stumble upon our times! The gospel is a merchandize and churches are franchises. Take the Hillsong franchise which comes complete with sets of equipment. There are trained pastors with manuals on how to grow that franchise, leveraging on the established brand. These preachers and these churches offer pretty much the

same service Michael Jackson did and Kevin Hart offers – entertainment. They have mastered their stages and their craft.

After a church service at the Potters House Church in Dallas, Oprah Winfrey was interviewing T.D. Jakes and remarked, ‘You are certainly the master in the Church; there is no doubt who is in charge’. She was referring to the absolute mastery of Jakes, not just of the stage and its accessories like lighting, music and all, but also to the fact that he had the audience spell bound with his deep philosophical postulations, life lessons and the unparalleled oratory which makes him arguably one of the world’s finest speakers. When Jakes performs before the massive crowd of thousands who throng his Church, the applause and standing ovations leaves you in no doubt at all as to what exactly is happening – a stellar performance.

Entertainment typically aims at emotions and fears, desires and hopes. Subjective though they may be, these primal emotions are very powerful drivers of human thought and behaviour. History is replete with evidence of leaders who exploited these same base instincts to cause wars, hatred and horrendous things. This brand of preachers on Christian stages have learned to harness this to very lucrative ends.

The basic weakness of this type of preaching is that it can never be faithful to the gospel ministry. It tailor makes its message with an audience in mind and aims to please it rather than the Lord. Compounding this problem is a people Paul spoke about, who "will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions" (2 Timothy 4:3).

MEDICINE MEN AND WITCHDOCTORS

In most African cultures, no one was revered and more sought after than the traditional medicine man. He was the healer and one who could see things others could not see and therefore divine the future and claim to be able to fix the curses of the present. This role has now been largely transferred to the preacher. He is in many ways just a modern traditional healer.

Then there are those whose messages in the pulpit are filled with the visions they saw, the dreams they experienced, and the little secrets the Lord told them. They are 'seers'. David Owuor is one like this; Thomas Wahome is another; and then there is the so called prophet T.B. Joshua in Nigeria who in the majority of his sermons is saying this or that which he saw.

In this group also is to be included those whose ministries consist largely of miracles, signs and wonders. They see their ministries primarily as alleviating people's problems much like the traditional medicine man. We often call them word of faith preachers or faith healers. Conrad Mbewe of Zambia, preaching at the Strange Fire Conference, posed the question, "Are we preachers or witchdoctors?" (<https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/TM13-13/>). The

question may have seemed extreme but if you look closely, you will find it was not far-fetched after all.

At the core of their ministries is the offering of 'spiritual solutions' to 'spiritual problems'. Consequently their messages advertise relief and help for such as would join them and have faith. Again we must restate that within reasonable boundaries of scripture we can appreciate the job of the traditional medicine man in seeking to offer natural solutions by way of herbs. In as far as that goes we have no fight with it. Yet if such a medicine man would insist that what he is doing is gospel ministry we would quickly and vehemently repudiate him.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

As we bring this first part to a close, I suggest that these descriptions we have offered above largely obtain in today's popular preaching. I end by saying, if it can be said in the context of an economics class, or a social therapy session; if an entertainer on a secular world stage can do the same with similar results; if the experience produced by it is not different from one conjured by a witchdoctor or some oriental mysticism – then IT IS NOT THE GOSPEL. In the second part we shall examine what we believe to be the distinctive features of the gospel and a true gospel ministry.

THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Huston Malande

PART 3: PARENTING

In the first and second parts of this series (Grace & Truth 126 and 127), we explored the vast gospel opportunities available to Christians by virtue of being a part of the virtual interconnected online world; then we gave specific consideration to the personal challenges posed by the double-edged sword that is the internet. We saw that the Bible has much to say about these realities, and that any reader's personal walk with Christ should be the better for it. But now we turn our attention in this last article to a most central yet commonly overlooked part of Christian life and community: parenting.

It is a uniquely challenging time to bring up children; as Charles Dickens would probably say, "These are the best of times, these are the worst of times."

The modern world offers numerous aids to parenting, from healthcare to educational materials to toys and games. But as with everything in this broken world, every good thing can be misused and become evil; refreshing water from the rock can turn deadly poisonous. The internet and social media are no different as far as parenting is concerned. So whether you're already a parent

or still hoping to have a family someday, you must (sooner rather than later) ask yourself, “How does God expect me to steward this resource called *the internet and social media* as I raise my children?”

Much could be said in response to this question, but there are 3 main things I’d like to focus on.

1. Guard Your Marriage

Too often, parenting discussions make the mistake of making a beeline for the parent-child relationship. I think we have to back up a little and begin at a much more fundamental level.

You see, before there were parents, there was a couple (ideally a married couple, but as we all know, things are not always that ideal). This is where we must begin. To ignore the husband-wife relationship in an effort to fix parenting would be to deal with a secondary issue without addressing the primary one; like fighting a kitchen fire without plugging the gas leak.

So what’s so important about the marriage relationship with regard to parenting? Does God even care? Has he said anything about it? Isn’t it enough for a husband to simply work and provide for the needs of his family? Isn’t it enough for a woman to feed and clothe and care for her children? Does it matter how she and her husband relate in front of the kids?

As it turns out, God actually does care. And no, it’s not okay for the husband and wife to cater to the children while neglecting each other.

Consider God’s word in Malachi 2:13-15:

And this second thing you do. You cover the Lord's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. But you say, "Why does he not?" Because the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth.

In this passage, God brings a charge against the people (really the men) of Judah—and a grave charge it is: Judah has been faithless towards God. But not just towards God, but towards the wives of their youth as well.

Imagine that! The astounding reality of this passage is that not only does God value faithfulness toward him so much that he speaks out against it, but in the same breath, he also speaks out against faithlessness in marriage! What a pairing!

Now, a cold and callous husband may be tempted to respond by saying, ‘But I haven’t divorced her! I’m still living with my wife. Surely you can’t expect

more from me ... she's a difficult woman ... I also have a life of my own to live! My concern is for the kids, that's all I can manage.'

I'm sorry, that's not enough. Look at verse 14 above. God says, "she is your **companion** ..." She's not your cohabiter. She's your companion! A companion! There's no escaping God's intent here. Marriage is first and foremost for companionship. But this is where it gets interestingly relevant to our parenting discussion. Verse 15 says, "And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring." Did you catch that? The reason why God hates divorce and faithlessness is because he's seeking **godly offspring**. It doesn't get more explicit than that, does it? A healthy and faithful relationship is not entirely and ultimately about the couple. God desires that whole families would come to know and worship him.

It is worth noting here that even though the direct opposite of the word *faithfulness* is *unfaithfulness*, the word that's used in verse 15 isn't *unfaithful*. Rather, it's *faithless*. Why? I think it's because it is actually possible for a husband or wife to be faithless without being unfaithful. Unfaithfulness means being involved with someone either mentally, emotionally, or (in its worst incarnation) physically, while faithlessness may be anything from emotional detachment to ultimate divorce. It's a lot harder to escape the net of faithlessness, and that's the net that God casts in the passage.

With that in mind, think of how often a spouse is prone to faithlessness in the way in which they use the internet and social media; it is a real stumbling block, and many present-day couples cannot but find themselves convicted by God's word through Malachi.

2. Google Is (Not) Your Friend

It is commonly stated that "Google Is Your Friend", a phrase so common that its acronym (GIYF) has joined the ranks of common internet lingo, right up there with LOL and FOMO. The sad reality, however, is that as far as parenting is concerned, parents are relegating a crucial role to the internet: something I like to call "guided discovery."

How often do you see a toddler being handed a phone to keep them busy? How tempting is it to say, "ask Google" when a child says, "Mommy, why is water colourless in a glass but blue in the ocean?"

What every parent must realize is that during the formative years of a child's life (before the "but our teacher said" phase kicks in), the parents are the single source of truth. They are both the unbeatable superheroes and the infallible oracles in the child's little world. This means that each parent has a unique opportunity to ensure that everything the child is learning and discovering fits into a coherent framework of logic, morality, and theology. When "Google it" becomes the most common answer to the child's questions, this critical role is lost, perhaps never to be recovered again. The child will

eventually subconsciously realize that the parent is a redundant part of their discovery process, and will for all intents and purposes remove them from the equation.

Don't be that parent.

3. Social Networks Are Hunting Grounds

I think most parents are completely naïve about the fact that every single social media network is full of all sorts of predators. As someone once said to me, “If I were the devil, it’s exactly what I’d do: target children in the places they least expect it.”

Look, if you’re not monitoring every single platform, and I mean every single platform that your child is accessing, I can guarantee with almost 100% certainty that they’re either seeing, listening to, or reading something that will at the very least make them addicts, and at worst, kill them. This is no joke. Just last year, 17 teenagers literally committed suicide as the final step of an ominous social media game.

Think of it this way: if Facebook (a worldly company) legally requires that no one under the age of 13 should be using it, how much more concerned should Christian parents be about what their children are doing online? It is imperative that we steward and safeguard the precious gifts that children are. If we don’t, things will backfire on us. As Proverbs 29:15 pointedly says,

... a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.

4. Conclusion: Model God

Even though I am not yet a parent myself, I hope and believe that God’s word has been instructive. One thing I can confidently lean on as I write, is the fact that I myself am evidently a product of God’s grace manifested primarily through Godly parents—parents that I am forever grateful for because they trembled at God’s word and did the best they could to raise me up in the fear and admonition of the Lord.

Please realize that if you have a son or daughter, you are the picture of divine authority to them. You are their earthly parent, and the degree to which you are faithful in that responsibility will greatly (and maybe permanently) impact their disposition towards our Heavenly Father.

When you and your children stand before God on Judgement Day, will they be grateful to God for you, or will they curse the day they were born? Will they curse **to whom** they were born? Do not neglect your child to wander the alluring but savage path that is the internet and social media. Model God to them. Their eternity depends on it.

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gntmag@gmail.com

or by mail to

P.O. Box 57907 00200 NAIROBI.

Chief Editor:
Keith Underhill

Editor:
John Muketha

Producer:
Murungi Igweta

Design & Printing:
Thelims Systems

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Trinity Baptist Church
P.O. Box 57907 00200 NAIROBI.
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Cell Phone: 0728 431067 (for M-Pesa)

E-mail: triniffice@gmail.com

Website: www.trinity.or.ke

You may send your questions, comments and compliments to:

**THE EDITOR,
GRACE & TRUTH MAGAZINE
Using the address above.**

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