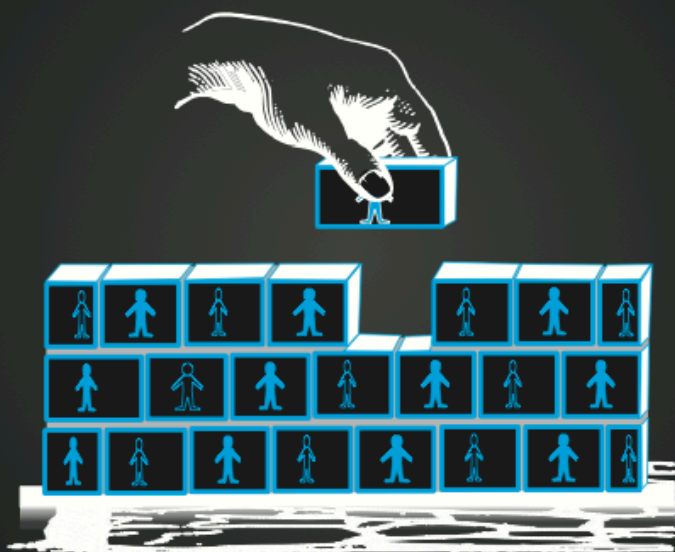


GRACE & TRUTH



CHURCH GOVERNANCE

**"I will build my church and the gates of
hell shall not prevail against it."**

Matthew 16:18



TRINITY BAPTIST CHURCH

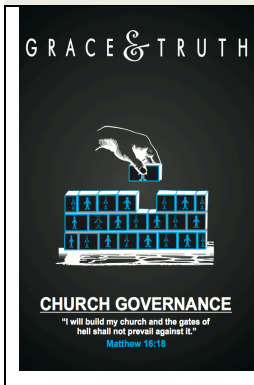
N A I R O B I

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: Who owns the Church? How should the church be governed? The Church belongs to Christ and as its Head and Chief Shepherd, He has placed its governance into the hands of the under-shepherds: Pastors/ Elders/ Overseers. What a privilege to belong to a Local Church where God's people willingly place themselves under the leadership, authority and accountability of Biblical elders with an attitude of great love, gratitude and honour to them!

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

On 4th March 2013, Kenya ushered in devolved governments created under the 2010 Constitution. One objective of devolution of government is to give powers of self – governance to the people and enhance their participation in the exercise of the powers of state and decision making. Devolution recognizes the right of the communities to manage their own affairs and to further their development. We may ask: what kind of governance is appropriate for the church? Church governance is about who should make decisions, what procedures should be followed, the kind of authority that characterizes those decisions or procedures, etc.

The church belongs to Christ as He declares in Matthew 16:18 – *“I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”* Christ as the Head of the Church (Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 1:18) has delegated the governance of His church to the “Local Church” as the decision-making entity. Each local church is to be governed by a plurality of Elders who are charged with the responsibility of taking care of God’s church. (1 Timothy 3:5). Christ’s intention is for each church to be independent and be able to decide on all matters affecting its operation.

The idea of ‘denominations’ or a group of churches under one bishop (or archbishop) is foreign to the New Testament. Paul in Acts 20 addressed the elders of the Ephesian church - charging them to *‘pay careful attention to themselves and the flock in which the Holy Spirit had made them overseers and also to care for the church of God which He obtained with His own blood.* John the Apostle was instructed by Christ to write to the Seven churches (Revelation 1:4) and not to a denomination but to individual churches with their own unique differences.

Church leaders are variously referred in the New Testament as Elders, Overseers, Bishops, Pastors/Shepherds depicting the nature of their work as assigned to them by the Head of the Church, who is the Chief Shepherd. These Biblical elders/pastors are to protect, feed and lead the flock even as they desire to declare the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:28). Elders lead, direct, manage, and care for the flock of God in addition to helping in meeting the practical diverse needs of the flock. The overall function of the elders is the pastoral oversight of the local church.

The New Testament presents a consistent pattern regarding the local church government as a plurality of elders ruling the church as Christ’s under-shepherds. This was the pattern followed by Paul in Acts 14:23 – *‘And when they had appointed elders for them in every church with prayer and fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.* It is quite evident that Christ the Head of the church rules His church through His under-shepherds – the elders-bishops-pastors whom He gives authority, and to them honour, submission and obedience is due. This authority does not imply superior standing before God since all Christians have equal access to God.

Hebrews 13:17 gives clear instructions regarding governance in the local church: *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.* God requires His people to willingly place themselves under the leadership, authority and accountability of Biblical elders and that with an attitude of great love and gratitude and honour for them. If your elders-pastors are faithful in their oversight, providing Scriptural counsel and responsible leadership, then God expects you to submit to them.

EPHESIANS 1:7

Governments are always setting goals. The Kenya Vision for 2030 is a vehicle for the transformation of the country into a rapidly industrialising and globally competitive middle income nation by the year 2030. It is not sufficient to set the goal; steps have been planned to achieve it. We ask, ‘What is the situation in Kenya now? What is needed to attain the goal?’ For example, in north Kenya the basic problem is infrastructure, so one of the first steps must be to build roads to develop trade. Similarly God has made His eternal plans, “before the foundation of the world”, and His goal is to adopt us as His children by making us to be holy and blameless before Him in love (1:4-5). But it does not just happen because God says so, as one great obstacle must be cleared – **sin**. This is the blessing of redemption.

1. WE NEED TO BE REDEEMED FROM TRESPASSES

We cannot receive the full blessing of heavenly glory while we remain in our trespasses. Remember the wedding guest who did not have proper garment, and who was thrown out (Matthew 22:11-13). To ‘trespass’ literally means to fall from the proper path, God’s path. All are guilty and conscience testifies to this fact. That you are a trespasser may not be a big thing to you. You say you do not feel guilty, but nor does a driver over-speeding feel guilty until he sees a policeman! Peter did not feel guilty until he came face to face with Christ in the boat and the great catch of fish (Luke 5:8). Perhaps you say that none are free from trespasses... ‘but you do not do the really big evils like murder, and you do much good!’ Could you use these defences in court if you were accused of over-speeding? Could you defend yourself by claiming that most drivers over-speed, that you try to be courteous and that you have never been a drunk driver?

A trespass is not just something you do and perhaps regret, for it has serious consequences. You become guilty of breaking the law, you are liable to prosecution, then to condemnation, and finally to imprisonment. Now think of a terrorist who realizes he is doing wrong, and wants to change, and even is willing to surrender. But he will almost certainly be arrested and condemned, *unless* there is an assurance of pardon. God has said as the Judge, “the soul who sins shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4). So how will you escape? We are like Israel as slaves in Egypt; how could they possibly release themselves? But what if God promises pardon...?

2. CHRIST REDEEMS US THROUGH HIS BLOOD ALONE

“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses”

‘Redemption’ is to set free from bondage, usually by the payment of a ransom price. Like Israel, we are set free to belong to God and serve Him as a firstborn son (Exodus 4:22-23). It is a very big idea involving all that happens to us to deal with our sins until we reach glory (1:14, 4:30). Here, just one aspect is brought forward, “the forgiveness of our trespasses”. To be redeemed means there is not condemnation, but release! A condemned traitor is pardoned from a life sentence; what a blessing! God Himself pardons us and says He has nothing at all against us to convict us (see Psalm 103:12, Isaiah 44:22, Micah 7:19).

How is this possible? The only answer is “in the Beloved” (v. 6), “through His blood” (v. 7, see Hebrews 9:22). There is *no other way*; it is the only way that actually redeems us. What if an Israelite, on the night of the Passover in Egypt, had laid out money, or signed a declaration to keep the law, but had not smeared the blood of the sacrificed lamb? The firstborn would have been slain as in all the dwellings of the Egyptians. It was only by the blood. On the Day of Atonement, one goat was offered as a sacrifice (Leviticus 16:15ff.), and another had the sin of the people of Israel confessed over it and was then sent away into wilderness never to return (vv. 20ff.). These two goats together beautifully illustrate that through the blood (death as a sacrifice) of Christ we are forever set free from our sins. What a cost! It shows how determined God was to redeem us from our sins!

Question: How do you know you are forgiven by God? There are many false answers to this question.

Answer 1 – ‘Because God is merciful’, some claim. God is truly merciful, and this mercy is seen above all in the giving of His Son. However, a problem remains: how can God forgive and remain just? The answer is in Romans 3:24-26.

Answer 2 – ‘Because I have repented’, others claim. Again, it is true that there is no forgiveness without repentance. But repentance by itself only opens you to judgment as you are confessing your sin which deserves to be punished.

Answer 3 – ‘The blood of Jesus Christ’- this is the only true answer. The song asks, ‘What can wash away my stain?’ and it gives the answer, ‘Nothing but the blood of Jesus’ (see also Hebrews 9:14, 1 Peter 1:18-19, 1 John 1:7, Revelation 5:9).

3. GOD REDEEMS US BY HIS GRACE ALONE

“According to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us”

Once again the **grace** of God is magnified as the only reason why such a blessing comes to anyone. Redemption, the forgiveness of our trespasses, is such a great blessing that it shows God’s grace is ‘rich’ and ‘lavish’ (or abounding).

Let us meditate on this blessing that it might cause us to rejoice.

- ***What did we deserve?*** Nothing good, only judgment from God, because God sees us as trespassers against His holy law. Are we better than Noah’s contemporaries? Or the Canaanites? If there is one thing God hates it is formal religion, hypocrisy, words without corresponding actions. Paul could never get over the fact that God had redeemed him (1 Timothy 1:12-16). Surely, all of us who are redeemed must ask, **‘Why me?’**
- ***Who decided to send Christ for us?*** It was not any man who thought of this great plan but God. Remember it was the one and only Beloved Son whom God gave, whom He did not spare (Romans 8:32). As the plan of God, He gave freely out of pure love, and we cannot claim any merit. Christ was sent to do everything for us that we could not begin to do for ourselves.

- **How can we measure His grace?** Do not measure it by your own character, but by God's. There were two brothers, John & Richard: Richard the 'lion-heart' was away fighting but on his victorious return he found the treachery of his brother. Richard forgave John as was his practice, but John himself would never have done that. To redeem sinners by forgiving their trespasses is what you would expect God to do. Do not measure grace by your ideas of forgiveness for perhaps you say that there are certain things that you could never forgive. And do not say that how much you are forgiven depends on how much faith you have. That also limits God's grace.

Has God freely and fully forgiven you? How then can you live as if you are still in a prison cell awaiting execution! You do not expect a prisoner to be happy who is only waiting for the noose to be tightened around his neck. But if the prison door is opened and he is set free, no words will be able to express his joy! Have you come as 'miserable sinner' under condemnation or as one knowing the grace of God in Jesus Christ? If there is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, ought not the sinner himself to be joyful?

To you who have never asked for forgiveness, what are you waiting for?

- ✓ Is it because you do not greatly feel your need? If not it makes your situation worse, as many go to doctor too late because their disease is too far advanced.
- ✓ Is it because you are not sure if God will forgive you? If God forgave the criminal in his dying moments, if the prodigal son was forgiven, if Saul as chief of sinners was forgiven, if most wicked Manasseh was forgiven...; if God sent His only Son, that is proof enough of His absolute willingness to save any and all who come to Him.
- ✓ Is it because you do not know what to tell God? Tell Him you know you are a trespasser, you deserve condemnation, but you are putting your trust in the blood of Christ. If you were pleading before an earthly judge you would know what to say. Forgiveness is a blessing you may have now in Christ. God is rich in grace.

THE VALUE OF PASTORS-ELDERS

*Perhaps it would be helpful here to stop and consider the value of pastors-elders. Scripture commands love, respect, admiration, "double honor," as well as submission. All of these commands assume that these men are not only faithful in their service but also uniquely valuable. **Think:** where would you be if it were not for the teaching and preaching you have heard from these men? Would you be a Christian at all? Would you have the spiritual joy and confidence that comes from the deeper knowledge of God's grace through Jesus Christ which they have taught you? Would you have a peaceful outlook on life without their instruction concerning God's faithful care and provision? Would you have the same happiness in your home if it were not for their faithful instruction to you from the Creator of the home? Just how valuable are these things? How valuable is that counsel which was given when you were in that deep struggle or time of grief? How can we value their intercessory prayers on our behalf? How can we attach appropriate value to these blessings? God has given us these men for these purposes, and when we consider them we understand better their value and find the commands to love and respect and submission to be happy ones. To be sure, these men make mistakes, sometimes big ones! But these good gifts of God to His church are worthy of our respect, love, and submission. And for them we should daily give God thanks and praise for providing for us in this way.*

Spiritual Leaders in the Local Church By Fred G. Zaspel
Published by Word of Life Baptist Church, Pottsville, PA

At the beginning of this article we repeat that there continues to be so much confusion about the subject of ‘conversion to Christ’. This is why we are studying Biblical accounts of conversions. So far we have looked at three accounts, those of the 3,000 on the Day of Pentecost, of Saul of Tarsus, and of Cornelius. We have seen the following elements:

- There is a period of preparation for receiving the gospel, shorter or longer, leading to conviction of sin.
- Conviction of sin comes through the preaching of the gospel of Christ.
- The response to the gospel is one of repentance and faith.

Conversion to Christ is publicly confessed in baptism.

In the case of Lydia in Acts 16:11-15 we will see the addition of one element which is most clearly developed in the account of her conversion. It is good there is this example of the conversion of a woman!

1. GOD’S WORK IN THE CONVERSION OF LYDIA

While everyone believes that God worked in the person of Christ, the conversion of a man is often regarded as the work of man. The account of Lydia, however, will clearly show us that conversion is totally impossible without God’s work. In Lydia it is all the more remarkable as she is another Gentile (like Cornelius) already devoutly attached to the Jewish faith, “a worshipper of God” (vv. 13-14).

*Conversion is totally impossible
without God’s work*

(1) *God’s preparatory work of providence in bringing Paul to Lydia.* Paul was specifically forbidden to preach in Asia and Bithynia (vv. 6-7), and through a vision was directed to Macedonia in Europe (vv. 9-10). So he arrived in the first great city of Philippi. Lydia was a business woman hundreds of kilometres away from her home in Asia Minor (v. 14). What is the explanation of this meeting in Philippi of two visitors to the town? God had purposed it, directing all events and times, as with Jesus and the Samaritan woman (see John 4). And when they met by the riverside it was the gospel that Paul was preaching.

(2) *God’s powerful work in the heart of Lydia as the gospel was preached.* Very simply we read, “the Lord opened her heart” (v. 14). We obviously conclude that, before the Lord did this, her heart was closed, and especially to the message Paul was preaching. The ‘heart’ refers to the inner life of a person, as opposed to the outer life that can be observed (see Matthew 15:8, 1 Samuel 16:7). Lydia’s whole inner life, her thoughts and desires, together with her conscience, could not be penetrated by the truth of God. What do the

Scriptures teach about the inner life of all people before conversion? Their minds are blind (2 Corinthians 4:4), their understanding is darkened (Ephesians 4:18, see Romans 3:11), their hearts are hard, they refuse to come to Christ because they are in love with this world (John 3:19). We are all like a house totally shut up and in darkness, with no godly inhabitants! Many of us can confess with the hymn-writer, 'Once I was blind but now I see', but only because the obstacle to seeing was overcome by the Lord Himself. God must 'open the heart', or in other words, give 'a new heart, a heart of flesh instead of a heart of stone' (Ezekiel 36:25-26), give a 'new birth' (John 3:3, 5). It is God who does this and it is the **only** way by which anyone will be able to receive the message of the gospel that is preached.

Do you begin to see how confusing and unbiblical it is to tell people, 'Open your heart to the word of the Lord'? It would be more reasonable to expect the leopard to change its spots, or the Ethiopian the colour of his skin (see Jeremiah 13:23). Scripture has become twisted because by nature we do not like the thought that we are totally dependent upon God in conversion as we are proud and therefore self-dependent. The fact is that evangelistic practice is based upon what we really believe; in this case upon an unbiblical teaching of the so-called 'free-will'. This teaching is that anyone can open his heart to the Lord whenever he pleases, because the will is totally free. This lies behind the practice of 'decisionism', or the 'Altar Call', where people are told to make an outward response to the preaching. Decisionism makes the sinner free, and Christ becomes the beggar pleading for entrance into men's hearts. You may be familiar with the pathetic picture of Christ outside the door of a person's heart, desiring to enter, but the door can only be opened from the inside. On the contrary, the Bible makes the sinner the beggar, pleading for God to do what he knows he cannot himself do, and does not deserve, and resting on God's freedom to what He pleases. Did the apostles Peter and Paul use 'decisionism' when they evangelized?

Decisionism makes the sinner free and Christ becomes the beggar

There is no evidence of this as they did not believe in 'free-will' (see Acts 13:48). Because decisionism is unbiblical it must have harmful results: it encourages many to think they are converted when they are not, for making a decision is not necessarily conversion; most who make decisions quickly fall away with the frequent result that their hearts are even harder (remember the seed falling on rocky ground in the parable of the sower). Brethren, because we are totally dependent upon the Lord to open the heart, let us pray expectantly and preach and witness vigorously in dependence upon Him (see 1 Corinthians 3:6-7). God employs the truth as a means of opening the heart.

2. THE RESPONSE OF AN OPEN HEART

Here is the great question that will show what we believe about conversion. Does a sinner first believe, and then God opens his heart, or does God first open the heart and then as a result the sinner believes? The answer of the Bible is very clear, as in what happened to Lydia. She only 'paid attention' to the gospel message because the Lord opened her heart (see John 1:12-13, 1 John 5:1).

(1) *Lydia paid attention to the gospel.* When God opens anyone's heart this is always the response. Some have the excuse that they cannot believe because God has not opened their heart. It is true that God must first open the heart, but nevertheless it is **your** solemn responsibility to respond to the gospel concerning Christ as the Saviour of sinners with repentance and faith. You may not use your closed heart as an excuse. A closed heart to the great truth of Christ only shows how wicked the heart is. How dependent on the Lord you are! At the same time this is so encouraging, because God is merciful and able to do what you are not able to do. Have you paid attention to the gospel? This is the real test of whether or not the Lord has worked in your heart.

(2) *Lydia was baptized.* In this way she showed her genuine submission to the Lord and her identification with the Lord's servants. Have you observed the pattern? First conversion, then baptism (2:38,41, 9:18, 10:47-48). You are not converted by being baptized, but it is not Biblical to profess conversion to Christ and remain unbaptized. The same Lord who commanded you to receive the gospel, and you did, also commands you to be baptized. Do not pick and choose between His commands, obeying some now, but delaying to obey others. Your professed experience of conversion could be doubted if it does not lead you to obey God in everything. If you love your Lord and you are not ashamed of Him, then declare your love in baptism. Then go on further and show that you have paid attention to God's word by being with His people and receiving more and more of that word (see 2:42). In this, note Lydia's persistence, her refusal to take 'No' for an answer. God's servants must stay with her so she can hear the word from them. Would that all who profess to be Christians have the same desires. For many once a week on a Sunday morning is sufficient. If this is you, ask yourself if the Lord has actually opened your heart.

Conversion is basically the work of the Lord. Ask yourself what mark is on you that shows without doubt that the Lord has been powerfully active in your life. Do not rest before God until you can answer with assurance.

Acts 2:47b – *“And the Lord added to their number day by day those being saved.”*

Who should become a member of the church of Christ? Only those who are saved. If you are born again Christ your Saviour expects you to be baptized and then identify yourself with a local church where you will enjoy the privileges of church membership and be able to meet your obligations.

WHAT IS A CHURCH? *Murungi Igweta*

What comes to mind when ‘church’ is mentioned? Do you first think of people or the buildings? If you think of a building, then you need to change your perspective of what a church is. Others, who think of church as people, imagine a crowd of people clapping and dancing to the tune of blaring music, with a group of young people leading in singing from the platform. What attracted you to your current church? Music? Physical facilities? The popularity of the pastor? The promise of healing and prosperity? Have you bothered to find out how biblical is your church?

The church is not an institution of men by men. Rather, it is a family, belonging to God to showcase God and His glory on earth. God describes it this way:

“... so that **through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known** to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.” (Ephesians 3:10)

“... if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in **the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.**” (1 Timothy 3:15, all emphasis added)

The church is a people called out by Christ through the Holy Spirit to worship God the Father in spirit and truth, with reverence and awe. He calls them to gather many more for the same purpose of rightly worshipping God. Christians as a body – the church, reveal the **manifold wisdom of God** to both the world and the spiritual realm!

The church is a family that belongs to the Living God. This means that God owns the church and is actively involved in its life so that the church remains His possession. It is His family for His glory. The church is the God-appointed instrument of upholding the truth on earth. Many mistakenly think that it is the Supreme Court or the state that upholds the truth! No! It is the church, which is the “**pillar and buttress of the truth**”. The church is built upon the Gospel truth from God, and exists to uphold this truth, as revealed by God through the Scriptures, which are able to make people wise for salvation. The Christian living ought to be a mirror of the truth that the church lives to showcase. This way God is honoured and glorified as the Great God and Saviour.

The church consists of all those who believe in Christ who have ever lived or will live. This is called the **universal church**. These are men and women boys and girls who have repented of their sins, trusting in Christ as their Lord and Saviour. They have experienced the saving mercy and grace of God in Christ. As a result, Christ adds them to a **local church**.

How do people become part of a local church? Many think that it is simply by attendance of a church. No! It is by being placed by Christ Himself by salvation. Then one is baptized both by the Spirit and in water. If one is transferring membership to another church, he/she has to obtain a recommendation from his previous church to the new church.

❖ What is the primary task of the church on earth?

- 1) **Worship:** To offer acceptable worship to God as prescribed in His word (John 4:23-24; Ephesians 3:10; Hebrews 12:28).

Worship means that the church is fully devoted to God, as He has revealed Himself in the Bible – this is worship in truth. The church is to be led only by the Spirit of God not an individuals' own senses! Worship also involves fellowship with one another, to share the bread and cup in the Lord's Supper, and prayer. They also share whatever material blessings God has given each one of them. This is what we see when the first church was constituted by Christ in **Acts 2:42-47**. Such worship by and large will remain in eternity, although a few elements of the present earthly worship might either be removed or changed. No wonder all the heavenly hosts described in the Bible are revealed to be fully immersed in the worship of God.

- 2) **Gospel mission:** To gather a community of those who will worship God (Matthew 28:18-20)

The church is required to make disciples for Christ from all nations. It invites sinners by the gospel; calling, inviting and drawing them by the power of the Spirit using the Word, to come to worship God. The great commission in Matthew 28:18-20, Christ especially commissioned His disciples to make disciples of all the nations, *until He comes*. They are not just to make converts and stop at that. They are to make disciples-making disciples until Christ comes for His church. This way the full number of both Jews and Gentiles – from every nation, language, tribe and race will ultimately bow before Him in worship for all eternity.

Are you actively involved in this work of testifying about the free salvation that there is in Christ? Are you inviting your spouse, your children, your relatives, your neighbours, your colleagues at school and at work to come by faith to Christ?

❖ What are the marks of a true church of God?

There are at least 5 marks of a genuine church:

1. The pure **preaching** of the word of God (Acts 2:42, 20:20,27, 1 Timothy 1:3-7,18-20, 4:16, 6:3-5,20, 2 Timothy 1:13, 2:1- 2,15, 3:14-17, 4:1-5).

What is preached must be the Christ-centred gospel. Pure preaching has to *humble the pride of man* by showing man to be a needy and helpless, poor and wretched sinner who needs God's mercy and the grace of Christ to be saved. Pure preaching has to *exalt the glory of God* in Christ by showing Jesus to be the one and only hope for sinners from whom there is full pardon for sins and eternal life.

2. Biblical **leadership** (Acts 6:1-6; 1& 2Timothy and Titus)

There are only two officers prescribed in the bible for each church – the **elders** and the **deacons** (Philippians 1:1; 1Timothy 3:1-13). Elders also called pastors or overseers/bishops provide spiritual oversight to the church (preaching & prayer). Each church is also to appoint men who cater for their material needs called deacons. Both officers must be *blameless* in their character, family life and ministry, to qualify to serve in the church of Christ (1 Timothy 3:2, 10; Titus 1:7).

3. Genuine *membership*:

While everyone is welcome to attend church, only genuine Christians form the membership of the church. As Christians we are to be a family, committed to each other; to love, accept, and forgive each other until death or God's call causes us to part.

We are to live in Jesus Christ and take his commands seriously. We are to help one another grow toward Christian maturity by: bearing one another's burdens, encouraging one another, exhorting one another, praying for one another, confessing our sins to one another, speaking the truth in love to one another, admonishing one another, building up one another, teaching one another, comforting one another, submitting to one another, serving one another, patiently bearing with one another, being hospitable to one another, living in peace with one another, regarding one another as more significant than ourselves, caring for one another, exercising our spiritual gifts to serve one another, being kind and tender-hearted to one another, being devoted to one another, accepting one another, forgiving one another, loving one another and greeting one another.

4. Right administration of the *ordinances* of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Baptism is only for true believers of any age. Whoever shows his/her faith by desiring to be fully committed to Christ and to the local church (Acts 2:41-42). Baptism must not be administered to a person because they were born of believing parents or went through a Bible class (therefore infant baptism is unacceptable). Baptism should be in the name of the Triune God (Matthew 28:19). Baptism should be performed by immersion in water because:

- 1) The Greek word for baptism means '**plunge, dip, immerse**';
- 2) All the examples of baptism in the Bible show that it was by immersion (Mark 1:5 "**in**", 1:10 "**out of**", John 3:23 "**much water**", Acts 8:38-39 "**down into**" and '**up out of**');
- 3) It is a symbolism of Christ's **death**, burial and **resurrection** (Romans 6:3-4, Colossians 2:12).

The *Lord's Supper* is for the members of a local church and saved visitors from other true local churches. It should be celebrated according to 1 Corinthians 11:17-34.

5. Right application of *church discipline* according to the word of God.

Church discipline is corrective and intended to keep members in the church. God's church is holy and must be preserved as such, since 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, without spot or wrinkle or blemish (Ephesians 5:27). Christ is coming to His church as a bride that is holy in His own sight (not in the sight of men). The church prepares for His coming by rejecting sin and excommunicating unrepentant members.

When evaluating your church, please consider that your feelings must be subjugated to conform to the truth of God's Word. You must not evaluate any church based on your feelings, tastes and preference.

❖ What are the modern trends and deviations witnessed in the church?

The situation right now in the church is appalling. Many churches are men-centred instead of being Christocentric. They pursue the pleasure of men rather than the glory of God. Their leaders are preoccupied with meeting people's felt needs such as health and wealth, deviating from the task of the church. On the other hand many Christians go to churches where they will hear music that will make them feel 'good.' They hear preachers who will address their concerns, so that in effect they gather for themselves preachers who will tell them what they want to hear. Many have itching ears, but only few would admit it!

The following are characteristic of many churches:

A. **Lack of truth**

1. They do not preach the whole Bible (they preach only a few verses here and there)
2. Unbiblical leadership (The Bible is not applied when appointing leaders)
3. Unbiblical membership (all who attend are considered to be members!)
4. Over-emphasis on money and material prosperity instead of Christ
5. Devoting most of the church's time to singing and physical healing

B. **Lack of godliness**

No genuine interest in the means of grace like:

1. Genuine desire for the knowledge of God in His Word
2. Sincere and biblical prayer (especially public prayer)
3. Fellowship of Christians
4. Right administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper
5. Lack of correct application of church discipline

❖ Conclusion

Not every assembly that has a signboard by its gates reading '.... Church' is a true church of God. The Bible says that there are those, although they look like churches are synagogues of Satan (Revelation 2:9)! Engage in a church that is committed to Christ and his Word.

Consequently you should find out whether your current church is truly biblical. What are its priorities – is the worship offered according to the Word of God or is it based upon pleasing men? Is your church gospel-centred and mission oriented? What are the distinguishing marks of your church? Is Christ central in the preaching, music, and lifestyle of the people?

You may check more on the subject at the author's blog: www.pastormurungi.blogspot.com

Bible Trivia Quiz!!

Which is the shortest chapter in the Bible?

Which is the central chapter of the Bible?

Which is the shortest Psalm? (*Answers on bottom of Page 17.*)

“Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, And naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord.” In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong.” (Job 1:20-22).

Death is an experience common to the human race since time immemorial. All of us have at one point or another lost a relative, a friend or any other acquaintance to death. Losing a loved one to death is a painful experience. If the deceased is a non-believer, then that is a double tragedy. Perhaps no other event in life brings us as close to the reality of eternity as death. One moment our loved one is here: breathing, smiling, chatting, eating; and the next moment he is gone. Even though the body remains, anyone who has been present at the moment of death knows quite well that the body is an empty shell and the person who once inhabited it has left. If the deceased was a Christian, it is the knowledge of his destination that gives us the hope that unbelievers simply cannot fathom.

In the narrative of Job, we encounter a devout man whom the Bible aptly describes as one who “was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil.” (Job 1:1). Before long, Satan enters the scene with a long list of pestilences and sieges against Job’s person and integrity. His reasons? He wants Job to curse God (vv.9-11). The loss of thousands of herds of livestock is clearly recorded (vv. 14, 16, 17) but what strikes one to the core is the sudden deaths of his many servants (vv. 14, 16-17) and the devastating perishing of all his ten (10) children at once in a storm! (v. 18). These calamities did not occur over a period of a few years or a few months or even a few days, but the operative phrase sandwiched between each calamity was “while he was yet speaking,” (vv. 16-18), which indicates that all of these things, all of these catastrophes, all of these troubles, all of these burdens of pain and mourning came crashing in on Job at once!

1. The Lord Gives! (v.21a)

Job tells us that nothing is originally ours. An old man who had the abundance of the things of this world knows better. Man, by birth, is destitute. When we are born we don’t even come on this earth with clothes to wear or water to drink. We came from dust and to dust we shall return. We came here with nothing, and we’re leaving with nothing. It does not matter what you’ve been able to amass for yourself while you’re here. You may have been able to consult top notch doctors with a mastery of modern medicine and technology. You have had access to the best known nutritionist and have done your best to eat healthy and exercise well. You meticulously keep a clean environment and observe all the hygiene rules known to man. Yet one thing is clear: the Lord gives!

Job had nothing when he came into the world, and all that he had obtained had been by the good providence of God. As the Lord gave it, the Lord had a right to remove it. The

Lord gave him a family; the Lord blessed the family with children. The family was bequeathed with enormous wealth together with many servants to take care of them. Such was the devotional feeling of Job, and such is the true language of submission for a Christian in sorrow. He who has a proper view of the human relations and possessions he has, will feel that it is all to be traced to God, and that God has a right to cut these things when He pleases. Job contrasts the heathen response that says, "My own hand hath gotten me this wealth (Deut. 8:17)." He acknowledges that it is God who gives. As he makes this pronouncement, he underscores the fact that God "gave" and inasmuch as God "gave" He also has the divine and sovereign right to withdraw at His pleasure.

All the happy families we have, all the enduring relatives, all the good friends, all the splendid health and household goods, all the outward enjoyments we have with our brethren, blood relations and social friends, all, are the Lord's, and at His disposal. These are the gifts of His providence to the sons of men. Your sons, your daughters, your parents, your spouses and every other relation you enjoy, are owing to the blessing of God. He gives these as talents which He puts into the lives of men to use for themselves and for others and for His service, and for which they are accountable to Him; and they are but stewards, with whom He will hereafter reckon, and therefore has a right to take away when He pleases.

2. The Lord Takes Away! (v.21b)

It is natural for all of us to experience a sense of indignation, even rage, at the loss of a loved one. This, I believe, is our heart's normal response to the death of a loved one. We recognize deep within us that death is uncontrollable, and everything in us cries out for death to just stop its devastation. The problem is that most people are theologically ill-prepared for the onslaught of these emotions. People, who are smarting from the pangs of the fresh wounds of death, may be tempted to mistakenly direct their indignation at God. Their bitterness and anguish can at that time be misdirected.

When death strikes in an especially unexpected way, for example in a sudden accident like in the case of Job, abrupt killings from robbers and sudden storms, there is always a sense that this was not meant to be. We are left reeling at the ambush of fate. This sensation of being caught off guard can sometimes lead us to feel as if God was also surprised. But the Bible assures us that God is absolutely sovereign over life and death. He is never caught off guard; He is never surprised at events. God ordains everything to the minutest detail. This is the truth that brings peace and rest to a heart that is staggering under the dizzying sucker-punch of sudden loss. *"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows."*(Matthew 10:29-31).

It is indeed astounding how Job ascribes to God, not only the giving, but the taking away: he does not attribute his losses to second causes, to the Sabeans and Chaldeans, to

the fire from heaven, and the wind from the desert, but to God, whose sovereign will and overruling hand were in all. Job acknowledges that these agents were but the instruments of Satan. He ascribes sovereignty where it belongs,... “And the Lord has taken away”. It is not by accident; it is not the result of haphazard reactions; it is not to be traced to storms and winds and the bad passions of people. It is not witchcraft or ancestral displeasure. It is the result of intelligent design, and irrespective of who had been the agent or instrument in it, it is to be placed at the door of the overruling providence of God.

Why did Job not vent out his wrath on the Sabaeans? Why did he not blame the Chaldeans? Why did he not curse the tempest and the storm? Why did he not blame his sons for exposing themselves to bad weather? Why not suspect the malice of Satan? Why not suggest that the calamity was to be traced to bad fortune, to ill-luck, or to an evil administration of human affairs or state insecurity? None of these things occurred to Job. He traced the loss of his precious children and faithful servants at once to God, and found consolation in the belief that an intelligent and holy Sovereign presided over His affairs, and that He had removed only what He gave.

3. Praise be to His Name! (v.21c)

So we see that Job made a true statement; that the Lord gives, and the Lord takes away. “In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong.” Even though Job experienced great pain and sorrow, he didn’t turn away from God. He continued to bless the name of the Lord. Even Job’s wife came to him and said, “Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!” (Job 2:9). But Job said, “You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?” (v.10). The Bible says, “In all this Job did not sin with his lips.”

This far, Job has sustained the shock of the calamity, and showed that he did not serve God on account of the benefits which he had received from Him. Stripped of all the family members, the workers, and all the wealth save for a nagging wife, Job remains steadfast in his endeavour to please the Lord. This is an exceedingly beautiful picture; and in the mouth of Job it was expressive of the most submissive devotion. It is not the language of complaint; as in him we see the deep feeling that the loss of his children and servants was to be traced to God, and that He had a right to do as He had done.

When David sorrowed, he prayed, “*You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?*” (Psalm 56:8). The touching image of God catching our tears is full of meaning. He sees our grief and does not disdain it. How many of us can say, like Job did, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.” (Job 13:15). Do we love God just because of what He can do for us? Or do we love Him because He is God? Do we only worship Him when the sun’s shining down on us, and the world’s “all as it should be,” or do we still worship Him when we go through sickness, devastating deaths and mourning? I want to challenge you today with the truth from God’s Word that says the Lord gives, and the Lord takes away. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and not accept adversity? Blessed be the name of the Lord!

Application

1. A Christian funeral should provide a glimpse into that brighter world, a world where all Christians will be reunited, where the bonds of fellowship shall be made stronger than they were on earth, never again to be broken. It is only this hope that can soothe the pains of grief at death. It is only when we can look forward to a better world, knowing we will see our loved ones again, love them again, and enjoy worshipping God with them forever that our tears are made dry. A Christian funeral should be a celebration of the joy of these glorious truths (Heb. 13:14).
2. We see Job's grief, but we also see Job's piety. Our text says he "worshipped." He praised God and acknowledged His sovereignty. He bowed submissively to God's will and God's dispensations. Instead of cursing God, Job adores His justice. He worships, and as he opens his mouth, everyone would stand at attention, and set their gaze, for words are about to spill forth from the lips of the one who, without his own knowledge or consent, is on trial. His mouth opens, and it is not as Satan expects! (Job 1:21).
3. This excellent text is speaking to a modern Christian who gets frustrated and cursing when the phone is ringing and the baby is crying and the children are hitting one another, and there's food burning on the stove, while the spouse is sickly, writhing in pain, all at the same time. I'd like you to reflect for a moment, what you would do when the calamities that befell Job happened to you! As everything he loved came crashing down right before his eyes, in quick succession, it is then that JOB AROSE AND WORSHIPPED (Job 1:20)!

Psalm 117

¹ Praise the LORD, all nations! Extol him, all peoples!² For great is His steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD!

Psalm 117 is a unique Psalm! It is the shortest Psalm and the shortest chapter of the Bible. It is also the central chapter of the Bible (with 594 Chapters on either side). Psalm 117 captures what is the heart of the Scripture – God's great love and faithfulness. Spurgeon says, "**this psalm, which is very little in its letter, is exceedingly large in its spirit, for, bursting all bounds of race or nationality, it calls upon all mankind to praise the name of the Lord.**" Luther wrote a 36 page commentary on it (an average of 18 pages for each verse).

Psalm 117 is a universal invitation to people everywhere to praise and brag on Jehovah because of His merciful love and faithfulness. God overwhelms His children with His love. How great is the God we know, love, worship and serve! This is a messianic psalm as Paul appeals to it in Romans 15:11 to show that God always had loved the Gentiles. The Psalm also looks forward to the day when Jesus Christ will reign. *After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"* (Revelation 7:9-10)

Let us get busy for Jesus and see Psalm 117 fulfilled so that all the nations might sing "Hallelujah" to our God and to the Lamb. Hallelujah! Praise the Jehovah!

Maybe you have said it or heard it from others; “I’m so glad I did my parenting a long time ago when times were not as hard as today.” While it indeed may be true that in certain ways the times are more evil, we must always keep in sight what God sets forth before us in His Word as hope for parents living in whatever time and age. It must be crystal clear to each of us that God’s grace is sufficient for the task He has set on our shoulders.

Think about what it must have been to bring up your three sons when all the rest of the world around you was given to such wickedness that God decided to destroy all of them. Such was the time when Noah and his wife were called to bring up his sons.

Consider the time of Amram and Jochebed when as slaves they were yet the parents of Moses, Aaron and Miriam. In fact concerning Moses, they only had a short season to train and teach him before surrendering him into the Lord’s providence – and that into the wicked household of Pharaoh. By the grace of God they were able to instil in Moses a clear sense of who he was as a child of God, as a Hebrew and as one called to serve and fear God alone. Moses did not forget this and later chose to suffer the afflictions of the people of God instead of enjoying the pleasures he had at his disposal in the palace of Pharaoh.

Reflect about the time in the New Testament when a young believing Jew was married to an unbelieving Greek and they had a son. This son was to be raised up in God’s way in the middle of a time which was filled with so much immorality and a huge part of the population was in slavery. And so Eunice, the mother together with Loice, the grandmother, sought to bring-up this child Timothy, in the manner set forth in God’s Word. It pleased the Lord to bless the work of their hand and Timothy becomes a godly man in an evil time.

How should you bring-up children in this age? How do you provide solutions to needs they have? How do we differentiate what will be to the child’s spiritual advantage from that which would be disadvantageous? Your hope must not be in yourself nor in your children but in the Lord.

Consider Job and how he parented in his prevailing context. Kindly ask yourself, how did Job live before God and his family? And secondly, how did he parent his ten children?

JOB 1:1-5

¹There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. ²There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. ³He possessed 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, and 500 female donkeys, and very many servants, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east. ⁴His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one on his day, and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. ⁵And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and consecrate them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, “It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts.” Thus Job did continually.

THE PIETY OF JOB

We make it very challenging for our children to walk in holiness if as parents we live for this world. I realize that as parents we can't give grace to our children. There are many godly parents whose children are unbelievers and many ungodly parents whose children are believers. But having said this, we do know that God will bless the training of children according to His Word. God is pleased to use the means of parents' teaching, instructing, guiding, admonishing and praying for their children's spiritual gain.

We need to stop and ponder whether our parenting will lead our children to destruction's 'wide way' or to salvation's 'narrow path'. As parents are we on the lonely, straight and narrow path that leads to life or the vogue and wide path which leads to damnation?

Parenting in godless times begins by focusing on the parent. We need to ask, "What is God saying about my life and my relationship to my children?" Let's consider the very instructive testimony of Scripture about the piety of Job.

"¹There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. ²There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. ³He possessed....." – Job 1:1

First note the ordering of Job's life. Before his possessions are mentioned in verse three, his family is introduced in verse two. And before his family is spoken of, we are first told about his walk in God. Should this not be the priority we all strive for in our lives?

The testimony of Job's life before his family and more importantly before God was one of Biblical prioritization. Should we not all strive for the same?

Blamelessness or Blessings

Let us firmly appreciate God's way of prioritizing things. Whereas Job was a man of great means even by today's economic standards, ("³He possessed 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, and 500 female donkeys, and very many servants, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east." – Job 1:3), this is not the chief way God's word speaks of him. Rather, Scripture celebrates Job three times (Job 1:1, 8 and Job 2:3) for the fact that he was a blameless, upright and God fearing man who turned away from evil.

Job lived before God and in a wicked age he is remembered for turning away from evil. Will your children celebrate you for the same? Or will you be remembered as the dad who watched whatever vice was on the TV? Job was the family priest and demonstrated concern for his own soul and that of his children.

THE PRAYERS OF JOB

⁵And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and consecrate them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, "It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually." – Job 1:5

Job had a serious concern for the spiritual well-being of his children. He didn't think of them as perfect and so laboured in prayer before God on their behalf.

There are several things we can learn from Job as a parent who prayed for his ten children.

1. He Prayerfully Followed The Life Of His Children
'And when the days of the feast had run their course...'

Job was aware of what was going on in his children's lives. He kept in touch on a daily basis and knew where they were and where they were headed because he had a godly concern for their well-being. ARE YOU FOLLOWING YOUR CHILDREN IN YOUR HEART? We will struggle to pray effectively for them if they are not regularly in our hearts.

2. He Prayerfully Offered Himself To God
'...and he would rise early in the morning...'

Managing 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke oxen, 500 female donkeys and very many servants could perhaps have been a reasonable occasion for Job to excuse himself from labouring in prayer for his ten children. If we want to be excused from prayer because we own one car, have two children and are studying for a post-graduate degree don't you think Job should be exempted from prayer? In spite of his busy schedule, Job rose early and prayed. HAVE YOU OFFERED YOURSELF AS AN INTECESSOR?

3. He Prayerfully Sought The Personal Consecration Of Each Family Member
'...he wouldoffer burnt offerings according to the number of them all'

That Job spent time to pray for each child is already very instructive to us in an age of hurried supplication that lumps up all the children and in a sentence asks for blessing on them. But that Job sacrificed for each of the ten children is something many today will scorn. "Why kill 10 lambs? It's too expensive. Just sacrifice one for all the children and leave the remaining nine to continue growing in your herd," we perhaps will reason. This however is not the way Job reasoned. He spent both time and resources in praying for each of his children. How about you? Will you spend your time and resources in seeking God with each of your children? Have you ever considered buying each of your children a Bible and then reading with them early in the morning or before they go to sleep? Have you thought of employing your resources in ensuring your children get Christian schooling instead of the government subsidized secular education that will most likely point them away from God?

Do our children appreciate the consequence of sin? Job's children clearly knew that sin leads to death. As they each saw an animal sacrificed on their behalf, they were made aware of God's holiness and the consequences or realities of sin. How about you – Do you clearly communicate the necessity and elements of gospel holiness to your family? Job impressed upon his children the call to Biblical holiness; one that goes beyond a concern for external behaviour to the hidden predisposition of the child's heart. ARE YOU PRAYERFULLY LOOKING AT YOUR FAMILY FROM GOD'S PERSPECTIVE?

4. He Prayerfully Persisted
'...*Thus Job did continually.*'

Job was consistent in his prayer life. Verse five seems to be a record of a time when Job's children had already left for their own homes. And yet, he continued in prayer for them even into their grown up years. It is not enough to rise up early to pray for our children once in a while. It is not enough to only pray during the easy or during the hard times. We must pray for our children at all times; whether easy or hard, whether they are young or old, whether they are still under our roof or have left to start their own families.

To be a godly parent in an evil age, we must be like Job. He modelled godly piety to his family and managed them prayerfully.

Church Membership Responsibilities – What are the Duties of the Membership?

The New Testament gives several specific commands to the church with regards to spiritual rulers: favor, esteem, love (I Thessalonians 5:12-13), honor (I Timothy 5:17), support financially (I Timothy 5:17; I Corinthians 9:4-14), remember, follow, obey, and submit (Hebrews 13:7 and 17). These commands demonstrate the authority of elders and obligations of those under their rule.

God requires His people to willingly place themselves under the leadership and authority and accountability of Biblical elders and that with an attitude of great love and gratitude and honor for them. This places great responsibility upon the elders who must lead responsibly and only within the framework of their God-given rule. This assumes that the pastors-elders are themselves living, leading, and teaching in obedience to the Scriptures. Church problems of so many kinds could be completely avoided if the elders-pastors were faithful and responsible in their leadership, and if those under their oversight were faithful to follow their lead. There are obligations given to both, and both are responsible to be faithful in their God-given roles for their own good, for the health of the church, and to the glory of God. If your elders-pastors are faithful in their oversight and are providing Scriptural counsel and responsible leadership, then God expects you to submit to them.

KNOWING THE ONLY TRUE GOD AND HIS ATTRIBUTES

Jackson Ngaine

In the prayer commonly called The High Priestly prayer, our Lord Jesus Christ prays to God, His Father, for His disciples “...**that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent**” (John 17:3). There are people who believe in the existence of God, but suggest that God is unknowable. But Jesus states that God is knowable, and he desires His followers to know Him,

And yet, as Dr. J. I. Packer laments in the Foreword of his book **Knowing God**,

“Ignorance of God - both of his ways and of the practice of communion – lies at the root of much of the church’s weakness today. Christian minds have been conformed to the modern spirit: the spirit...that spawns great thoughts of man and leaves room for only small thoughts of God. The modern way with God is to set him at a distance, if not to deny Him altogether; and the irony is that modern Christians, preoccupied with maintaining religious practices in an irreligious world, have themselves allowed God to become remote... Christian minds have been confused by the modern scepticism.... that denies that God’s control of his world was either direct or complete.. As a result, the Bible has come under heavy fire, and many landmarks in historical Christianity with it. The foundation-facts of faith are called into question. Did God meet Israel at Sinai? Was Jesus more than a very spiritual man? Did the gospel miracles really happen? Is not the Jesus of the gospels largely an imaginary figure?”

Why Does Jesus Want Us To Know God?

The whole object of knowing God is that we may learn how to worship God, and how to be truly God’s people. If we do not know God personally, we cannot worship Him properly because we will not know how He desires to be worshipped.

God’s Revelation of Himself

The vantage point where we can start discussion about knowing God – His being and his attributes, is to look at God’s own revelation of Himself. This is by both the display of His mighty works of His creation, and by what He has spoken: His name, and the other things that He has told about Himself. The Bible assumes throughout that God must first disclose Himself before man can know Him. Man, left to himself could never have had any knowledge of God. Therefore, a revelatory initiative by God is needed because God is transcendent; that is to say that He exists apart from, and not subject to the limitations of the material universe. He is so far from man in His mode of being that man cannot see Him, nor find Him out by searching (Job.11:7; 23:3-9) nor read His thoughts by shrewd guesswork (Isaiah 55:8).

As Christians, we believe that God has revealed Himself to man in two different but complementary ways; namely, by general revelation and by special revelation.

(1) **General Revelation** is prior to special revelation in point of time. It is the display of God’s works of creation and providence - the physical things, the earth and all that is therein, and the heavens the sun, moon and the stars, the forces and the laws of nature in operation, and in the facts of experience in history. They display the infinite majesty, power and glory, and wisdom of God. “*The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.*” (Psalm 19:1 – 2). But general revelation, although essential, is not sufficient.

For example, it does not tell us anything about God's mind, what He requires, His moral law, His wrath against sin, His demand for worship and obedience, His kindness to men, and His forgiveness of sin.

(2) **Special Revelation** is not a substitute for general revelation but a most essential complement to it. It comes to man in the form of personal verbal communication. God, in order to tell us about Himself, has spoken a language that we can understand so that we may know Him. In special revelation God actively discloses His name, His nature and character, His will and His ways, His plans, and His intentions. Moreover, and most of all, God is revealed as the Redeemer and Restorer of the fallen man, the One who shows mercy to sinners.

The Bible - God's Book of Special Revelation

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones' statement on God's special revelation - in his book 'God The Father, God The Son' (p.15), most appropriately writes,

"The special revelation which we find in the Bible has a very distinct and definite object, which is to reveal to us the character of God, the nature of God, and especially the character and nature of God as they are revealed in His saving grace. That is the thing about which we are concerned: how to know God and to be blessed by Him. Now the Bible makes a unique claim at this point; ...that it and it alone gives us this special knowledge of God. The Bible claims for itself that it is the record of God's special revelation of Himself and of all His gracious and saving purposes with respect to men and women".

And Louis Berkhof, in his **A Summary of Christian Doctrine** (p.12) weighs in,

"The Bible is pre-eminently the book of God's special revelation, a revelation in which facts and words go hand in hand, the words interpreting the facts and the facts giving substance to the words".

A good starting point about God's special revelation is the scene at the burning bush where God spoke to Moses saying, "*I am God, the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob*" (Exodus 3:6). Then He gave Moses the name by which He desired to be known: "I AM WHOM I AM" (Exodus 3:14). It is a descriptive name, pointing to all that God is in Himself. That revelation came on the verge of the deliverance of the people of Israel from Egypt.

After the exodus, God gave another revelation to Moses on Mount Sinai, this time as the only true God of the delivered nation of Israel. "*I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love Me and keep My commandments*". (Exodus 20:2-6)

These verses make three important points: (i) We are to worship only the one true God (ii) We are to reject the worship of any other gods, false gods (iii) We are to reject the worship of the true God by any means that are unworthy of Him, such as the use of images or pictures. Why? An image or picture cannot at all communicate God's great attributes: His sovereignty, righteousness, mercy, love, justice. Rather it obscures them. Images and pictures can only mislead those who would worship Him. Therefore, any physical representation of God is wrong and dishonouring to Him.

The Being of God

God is a Person: The presence of God is always described in the Bible in a personal way. Although God is invisible to human eye He is, nevertheless, a person. If I hear a voice say “I am”, I intuitively conclude at once that that utterance is of a person, even though I cannot see the body or form of that person. It is only a person who can say “I am”, and God speaks of Himself in that manner. God used the name “I AM” to declare that He is a person with a mind, intelligence, will, reason, individuality, self-consciousness and self-determination, and not simply a pool of unconscious force or power.

God is Spirit: It is clear from the Bible that God is a personal Spirit. Jesus told the Samaritan woman, “*God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth*” (John 4:24). God is infinite spirit.

His Attributes

For the sake of convenience only, God’s attributes are classified in two ways; namely (i) incommunicable attributes, and (ii) communicable or moral attributes.

Incommunicable attributes are exclusively God’s perfections, which belong to God, who is the only infinite and eternal person. They cannot be communicated or shared with finite creatures. And they have no analogy in human persons. God’s infinity is the anchor of all His other attributes.

By God’s **infinity** is meant that He is an absolute being, not derived from something else nor conditioned by anything else; He is **self-existent** and self-sufficient. Unlike His creatures, He does not depend for His existence on anyone outside Himself. God has no origins and consequently is answerable to no one. He is without bounds or limits to His being, every aspect and element of His nature, and His attributes.

His infinitude in relation to time is spoken of as **eternity**. He is the Lord of time and, therefore, not subject to, or limited by it: “*From everlasting to everlasting, You are God*”, declares Moses, the man of God (Psalm 90:2).

In relation to space, He is **omnipresent**, which is to say that God is everywhere. Someone has put it that God “is Himself the Everywhere”; and in relation to the universe it implies both **transcendence**, that is, His detachment from His creatures as an independent, self-existing being. He is not shut in by nature, but infinitely exalted above it. Isaiah 40:12-17 lays emphasis on His exaltation as a being external to the world; and as its sovereign Creator and Judge. However, His exaltation does not mean that He stands apart from the world, as a mere spectator of the works of His hands from a distance. Isaiah 57:15 expresses the transcendence of God as “*One who high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy*”. The same verse also expresses His **immanence**, that is to say, His all-pervading presence and power within His creation, the One who “*also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.*”

Arising from His self-existence and His eternity, God is **immutable**. He is not subject to time, so there is no change in His being by reason of passage of time and age, nor does He change His mind or His purposes. God is changeless. He is absolutely unchangeable in His being, His character, His counsels, His will, His purposes, and His promises. He does what He has determined beforehand to do and His will never varies. He is “*the same yesterday, and today, and forever*”. (Hebrews 13:8).

It is important to emphasize this attribute because we ourselves are very changeable; we are one thing one day and something else another day, though we are still the same

person. God is unchangeable in all His attributes. So we need not fear, for example, that the God who once loved us in Christ will somehow change His mind and cease to love us in the future. *“God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?”* (Numbers 23:19).

Such a statements should be a source of great comfort to God’s people. If God were like us, He could not be relied on. He would change, and as a result of this, His will and His promises would change. We could not depend on Him. Similarly, we must not think that perhaps He will change His attitude towards sin (as the modernists tend to think) so that he will begin to classify as “permissible” something that was formerly prohibited. Sin will always be sin because it is defined as any transgression of or lack of conformity to the law of God. Suggestions of change [of mind] attributed to God in the Bible, for example, *“The LORD was sorry that He had made man* (Genesis 6:6) only mean that, in His dealings with changeable human beings, God varies or adjusts His fixed procedures according to whether they repent or not. It is in God’s character to react, to show severe displeasure with human sin. Dr. Lloyd-Jones cautions that when we use the term “immutability” we must be very careful that we do not deny the idea of the personality of God. The immutability of God is not the immutability such as that of a lifeless stone or a machine. God’s is not the immutability of lifelessness but of absolute perfections because God is personal in His dealings with men and women.

Communicable or Moral Attributes: These are some of God’s attributes or qualities which we, His creatures, possess but only in a measure. They include *righteousness, wisdom, power, justice, faithfulness, mercy, love, and goodness*. God is all-wise; but we also possess a measure of wisdom; He is all-powerful; but we also exercise some limited power; He is all-righteous; but we also can be righteous [c.f. Romans 1:17; 4:22] and so on. These are some of the attributes the Apostle Peter urges Christians to *“proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light”* (1 Peter 2:9).

God is fully expressed in each one of His attributes individually and in all of them together. For example, we cannot say that God is partly love and partly justice and partly wisdom; He is all love and all justice and all wisdom. Man remains man even if he does not possess certain human attributes, but God is not God without all His attributes.

Full knowledge of God

It must be admitted that, even when we have known all that we can possibly know of God and His attributes, we will never have a comprehensive knowledge of Him in this imperfect world. Nevertheless, the much He has been pleased to make known to us in the Bible is sufficient to aid our proper worship and service to Him whilst on our earthly pilgrimage. It is upon us to obey and endeavour to do them; for *“The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law”* (Deuteronomy 29:29).

But still, the Christian’s greatest hope remains firm and sure, as the Apostle Paul reminds us, *“For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.”* (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Spurgeon’s Catechism

Question 4: What is God?

Answer: *God is Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in His being wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.*

'Any more questions?' asks the moderator as the clock ticks 8:15. The audience looks back at him, no hand shooting up. He raises his eyebrows in contentment and hands the microphone back to the panellists seated in a line behind the table at the front of the audience. The one in the middle, Pastor Murungi Igweta, takes the microphone, steps forward and proceeds to give the closing remarks. Before he prays to conclude, he dares the audience to take the Scriptures for all they clearly say, as a rule for Christian doctrine and practice. The day's main concerns seem to have been sufficiently addressed: The Bible does tell us who should be a church leader, how we should respond to them, and the issue of women pastors. The topic was 'Church Leadership'. The crowds stream out as a few young men hustle to remove the sound system from the meeting hall. The month of May's Meaty Forum has just ended. Next month's topic will be communicated to them via social media.

Such are the monthly events that have been taking place in Nairobi Baptist Church since April of last year (2012). A group of youth calling themselves '*Kingdom Republik*', largely members of Trinity Baptist Church and Emmanuel Baptist Church, came together for the idea. They were seeking to create a context to spread the gospel and address false teachings and errors of their contemporary culture. Hot at that point was the ever-so-resilient prosperity gospel which seems to have a thousand ugly heads.

The Meaty Forum is a ministry of Trinity Baptist Church, Donholm. Thus far God has enabled the forum to tackle several topics and try to present a Biblical perspective to them. The topics include: '*What is Truth?*', '*The Authority of Scripture*', '*Sin*', '*The Sovereignty of God*', '*Church Leadership*', '*Blessings and Curses*', '*Genuine Conversion*', '*the relationship between Gospel and politics*', '*the Church*', '*Church Leadership*', among others. I talked with Charles Ndung'u, one of the organizers of the Meaty Forum, and got the following interview:

G&T: So, why the name 'Meaty Forum'?

Charles: The name meaty forum came about from the fact that Paul used to call the weighty matters of the faith as meat as opposed to milk

G&T: When was the idea for the MF hatched?

Charles: The idea was hatched by David Kuria [one of the leaders of the group] in around 2011 [towards] the end [of that year].

G&T: As regards these 'weighty matters of the faith', how do you arrive on which matter to discuss every forum?

Charles: We have a Meaty Forum committee that meets each month where we discuss the topics and then pass them to our Elders/pastors at Trinity Baptist for approval

G&T: What is the Meaty Forum trying to achieve?

Charles: [The Meaty Forum's] objective is to bring back the biblical truths that have been neglected in the modern church. And to expose the lies that are being propagated by wolves in sheep's skin

G&T: Why does the MF choose to work with Trinity Baptist, or any church for that matter?

Charles: MF is a ministry of TBC which is a church that has endeavoured to stay true to the word. We also work with others from especially Emmanuel Baptist Church [a church with] which we agree on fundamental truths.

G&T: Why not just be an independent group (without being under TBC)?

Charles: We believe ministry should always be done by a group which has been sent out by a local church. It also ensures accountability

G&T: That's commendable, brother. I wish other 'ministries' out there would realize that. Onto current matters now: Which issue will you be discussing in the next Meaty Forum in June, and how do you think the modern church has neglected/abused that particular truth?

Charles: As I said earlier we are talking about the biblical truths. [We will be discussing the topic 'The Church']; meaning the standards that God has set for His church.

G&T: Thanks, I appreciate that. Your answers *ziko poa sana* (your answers are very good). How would you evaluate the progress of the Meaty Forum so far? Do you think it's within the original vision or has it gradually developed into something different?

Charles: I believe the Meaty Forum is growing in that in the past year we have learnt a lot and also we are hoping to expand it. But the core reason we started with [still] remains.

G&T: Thank you.

Charles: Any other question?

MF: How do you dream of expanding the Meaty Forum, as you've said?

Charles: We are hoping to see how we can organize the Meaty Forum in campuses and also eventually have it taking place in different parts of this nation

MF: It must be a journey for you and the rest of the team. Tell me, how have you (or other guys in the team) grown through participation in the Meaty Forum?

Charles: When we started we thought we knew a lot of the answers to tough questions. But we have been greatly humbled and have grown in knowledge in the past year.

G&T: Amen. *Semper Reformanda*. Any challenges?

Charles: Our biggest challenge remains getting a venue closer to the city centre for easier access.

G&T: Any comments about the panellists?

Charles: God has graciously provided us with great panellist in the past year including Pastor Keith Underhill, Pastor Murungi Igweta, Pastor Ken Mbugua, [Ronald Kalifungwa of Zambia, Joshua Karani of Faith Reformed Baptist], Dan Huffsturtler, Chris Kiagiri, Chris Gathihi and other teachers with the wisdom to teach.

G&T: How can you evaluate their participation so far?

Charles: The panellists have played their role so well that many times there is no question still lingering on peoples' minds on a topic

G&T: Can you say that the MF pushes for the spread of Reformed Theology in Kenya?

Charles: If by Reformed Theology you mean fighting as the early Reformers did to fight for the Church to go back to being guided by the word, if God has spoken through the Bible, then yes that's what we are trying to do

G&T: What would you say to other youth groups doing ministries like the MF?

Charles: I would tell other youth to serve the Lord while we are young but to do it under the wise guidance of our older members of our churches

G&T: Thank you for the interview, brother, any closing remarks?

Charles: Everyone is invited to come to the Meaty Forum every second Friday of the month at Nairobi Baptist from 5:30 to 8 pm

(Reviews of the monthly Meaty Forum can be found at www.kajvincent.wordpress.com)

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Grace & Truth is a quarterly magazine that promotes a deeper understanding of the Biblical truth so as to know the Triune God in order to love Him more and serve Him better. It is sent to you free of charge through the generous contributions of other Christians.

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P.O. Box 57907 00200 NAIROBI.

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Design & Printing:

Thelims Systems

Published by:

Trinity Baptist Church

P.O. Box 57907 00200 NAIROBI.

Tel: 0202626016 or 0202626023

Cell Phone: 0728 431067

E-mail: info@trinity.or.ke

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Using the address above.**

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