

THE NEW COVENANT SERVANT

Zac Poonen

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For further details, please contact:

*Christian Fellowship Church
40, DaCosta Square ,
Wheeler Road Extension,
Bangalore-560084,
India.*

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CHAPTER ONE

GOD CALLS AND PREPARES HIS SERVANTS

God needs men to do His work, because He has made His work on earth to be dependent on man. If the man God calls is not ready, God's work is delayed or hindered. However if one man fails to respond to God's call, God will call another.

God called Abraham when he was in Ur, to leave his home and his relatives and to go into an unknown land. If Abraham had been unwilling to obey, God would not have forced him. God would have called someone else. And we would never have heard of Abraham.

It is a tremendous privilege to be called by God to serve Him. But it brings with it a great and awesome responsibility too.

In God's perfect plan for the descendants of Jacob, they were to spend exactly four centuries in Egypt. He had told Abraham many years earlier that his descendants would be slaves in a strange land for 400 years (Gen.15:13). But when God finally delivered the Israelites from Egypt, they had spent 430 years in Egypt (*Exod.12:40*).

Why did they have to spend 30 years longer than God's perfect plan for them?

In all probability, because Moses was not yet ready to lead them. To deliver the Israelites from Egypt, God needed a man. But that man had to be prepared by God first to be a spiritual leader.

God's Servants Have To Be Broken

When Moses was 40, he was strong in himself and felt qualified to be the leader of the Israelites. Yet in God's eyes he was not ready.

Acts 7:22 says that at the age of 40, "Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action." (*Living*). When Moses visited his Israeli brethren one day, he saw one of them being unjustly treated by an Egyptian. He defended the Israelite and killed the Egyptian. He thought that the Israelites would recognise him thus as their God-appointed leader. But they did not

Moses still did not understand what it was to be a servant of God.

And so God took Moses out into the wilderness to break his confidence in his human strength and wisdom. In God's perfect plan, that training was probably scheduled to take only 10 years. But it took 40 years instead, for Moses to be broken.

And so the Israelites had to wait for 30 more years - for their leader to be ready.

God's plans can be delayed when God's leaders are not broken in time. God has an appointed time-period in which we must be broken. We cannot shorten that time-period. But we can lengthen it, if we do not yield to God's training. If we are hard and unyielding, we ourselves will lose much. And God's work also suffers.

We may see ourselves, like Moses, well-taught in the doctrines of Scripture, knowing the whole counsel of God, anointed with the Holy Spirit and in our own eyes, as "*men of power in words and deeds*" (*Acts 7:22*). We may even be concerned, as Moses was, about our defeated and oppressed brothers. And so, we may imagine that we are well-equipped to serve God. But we are not.

We may be eloquent in our speech ("*mighty in words*") as Moses was. The mere fact that others are

willing to listen to us preach for one hour proves nothing, for people are willing to listen to political leaders for even two or three hours!! We have to be careful that we don't seek to do God's work with our natural resources.

The more gifted we are, the more we are in danger of depending on our human abilities to serve God. That's why we need to be broken.

The Israelites did not have confidence in Moses. God also did not have confidence in him to appoint him as their leader. How can a man lead others when neither God nor man has confidence in Him?

We may consider ourselves as fit for God to use as His representatives. But God may not think so. If we are to do an effective work for the Lord, we must have the attestation of God on our ministry. And He won't attest our ministry until we are broken.

Once Moses was broken, the same man who was once mighty in words, finally said, "*Lord, I cannot speak*" (*Exod.4:10*).

How did God break Moses? He sent him into the wilderness. There Moses got married and had to live with his wife's parents in their home. It is amazing how quickly one can be broken when he has to live in helpless dependence upon his in-laws!! That was how God broke Jacob too, many years earlier.

It was in Moses' *home* situation (with his wife and children, and in-laws) and in his *work* situation (looking after his father-in-law's sheep) that God broke him and humbled him. And that education took 40 years. God was willing to wait. And God's people had to wait too - for God's man to be ready.

God is waiting even today. There are many places in India where there are needy souls who need to be built together as the Body of Christ. But God is waiting for men whom He can find, whom He can break and prepare, to be used as His servants to build that Body.

That is why we need to see our *home* and *work* situations as God's University. The tense situations that we face with our in-laws and other family members are all part of God's education process whereby He prepares us to be His servants. He is teaching us something more than doctrine in these situations. He is *breaking* us.

But how few God finds who submit to Him, as clay in the potter's hand. Most trainees rebel and refuse to die to themselves - and so God sets them aside.

What Moses learnt in those 40 years was not doctrine. Doctrine can be learnt in a very short time, if one has a clever mind. *But it takes time to be broken*. It is not easy to be *rooted and grounded* in small thoughts about ourselves at all times.

We may not consider ourselves as important people when we are in the midst of more mature believers. But when we go to our own home-churches, *there* we can begin to think we are quite important. That's the danger. God has to break us so thoroughly that we recognise ourselves as the *least* of all the saints, *everywhere we go*.

God Calls Young Men

Jesus called very young people to be His apostles. Many think that to be an apostle one must be at least 60 or 65 years old. But Jesus chose 30-year-olds to be His first apostles. Jesus Himself was only 33-1/2 when He died. And the eleven apostles were all younger than Him - for we know that rabbis among the Jews always chose people younger than them as their disciples. John may have been only 30 on the day of Pentecost.

When Jesus called these young men, He didn't look at their experience, but at their wholeheartedness. On the day of Pentecost these young men were anointed with the Holy Spirit and equipped supernaturally to be apostles of the Lord. Their experience and maturity came later. Timothy too became an apostle as a very young man (*1 Tim.4:12*).

God calls young men to His service even today. But they must remain humble. The main danger that faces any young man who has been called of God, is *spiritual pride*.

I have seen many tragic cases in India, of young men called of God to be His servants, who have fallen from their calling. In some cases, as soon as God began to use them in some way, they got puffed up - and God had to set them aside, because they took the glory to themselves that belonged to God. In

some other cases, they sought worldly comfort, and ended up as paid workers of Western Christian organisations that paid good salaries. Thus they went astray like Balaam. And in yet other cases, they were attracted by pretty Delilahs, and lost their anointing like Samson. Thus these fine young men sacrificed the calling of God and their anointing, for gaining man's honour and money or for satisfying their lust for pretty women.

Where are the prophets of God in India today who speak forth God's Word fearlessly, and who do not care for money, or for pretty women or for the approval of men? They are rare to find. Those who were called of God have mostly fallen by the wayside.

The sacrifices of God are a broken and contrite spirit. If we are broken and humble, God will always use us. But the day we think we have become somebody, because of the great revelations that we have received, or because of the tremendous ministry that God has given us, we have started backsliding. God will then set us aside.

We may still retain our position as elders in some church. But we will discover in eternity that we have wasted our lives.

God Calls "Zeroes"

In *1 Corinthians 3:5*, Paul asks the question "*What then is Apollos and what is Paul?*". We would reply that Paul was a mighty apostle of the Lord, who had raised the dead, established many churches, and even written Scripture. But he says of himself, "*What is Paul? A SERVANT*". That was his opinion of himself until the end of his life. No wonder Paul never fell by the wayside.

The moment we begin to think of ourselves as anything other than *servants* of others, we have begun to backslide.

Paul says further, "*I planted, Apollos watered*". Which of the two is greater? The one who plants - who goes as a pioneer to an unreached area and does a work for God where nothing existed before? Or the one who comes along later and waters the plant through the teaching of God's Word and encouragement, and builds the believers into a Body? The answer is "*Neither*". Both are "*nothing*" - says Paul (v.7). Both are *zeroes*. Only God - Who caused the plant to grow - is everything.

Paul considered himself a zero until the end of his life. And so God could use him till the end of his life. God was everything to Paul.

The Lord needed a donkey once to speak to Balaam. He needed a donkey at another time to ride into Jerusalem. And He has need of donkeys even today for His purposes. Who are we then? Just donkeys whom the Lord has picked up, to speak through, or to ride on.

Wherever brothers are *willing to be nothing so that God might be everything* there will never be any competition among them as to who is considered to be the most spiritual or the greatest etc.,

Whenever a person tries to project himself as the leader of a group, God will put him on the shelf. It is true that every church must have leaders. But the leader is someone whom God selects.

And if God gives another brother the grace to be recognised by the others as their leader, we should be quick to humble ourselves and accept that fact. If however, we become jealous of his ministry, or covet his position, we will become agents of Satan who hinder the building of the Body of Christ in our locality.

God in His sovereignty knows who is the best person to lead any church. And He doesn't look for the clever and the intelligent. He chooses those who are weak and broken and those who realize that they are *zeroes*. Have we realized that?

CHAPTER TWO

GOD'S STRICTNESS WITH HIS SERVANTS

The Word of God teaches us one thing from beginning to end - *that God requires much from those to*

whom He commits much. God is strict with His servants because He has committed much to them.

When Moses was on his way to Egypt, after being commissioned by God at the burning bush, we read that God tried to kill him (*Exod.4:24*). That is amazing, considering the fact that God had just called him to His service. And Moses was the only man on earth who was fit to fulfil that task. He was the most important person on earth for the fulfilling of God's purposes, and God had spent 80 years training him!! *Why then did God want to kill Moses?*

Moses' wife, Zipporah, not being a Jew, had not believed in circumcising their son. And Moses had submitted to his wife's opinion, and disobeyed God. Moses was now going to be the leader of God's people. And yet here he was pleasing his wife and disobeying God in his own home. When Moses was dying, Zipporah knew at once the reason for her husband's illness. So she circumcised her son immediately. Only then did God spare Moses' life.

There we can see that God does not tolerate any compromise or disobedience or wife-pleasing in His servants. If we are to lead God's people, we must be totally obedient. There is no partiality with God. He will judge even His most eminent servants if they disobey Him.

The Importance Of Patience

When Moses was 120 years old, God punished him again. And this time the punishment was not lifted. God had told him to *speak* to the rock for the water to flow. But Moses lost his temper and hit out at God's people first and then *hit* the rock too (*Num.20:7-13*). That looks like a small mistake to us. But it was serious in God's eyes.

Moses spoke angrily to the people saying, "*Listen now, you REBELS...*" (*Num.20:10*). The implication there was that all the people were rebels, whereas Moses himself was not! But Moses too was a rebel for he disobeyed God the very next moment. God was not happy with such speech. God's Word says that "*it went hard with Moses, because he spoke rashly with his lips*" (*Psa.106:33*).

Do we see the rebellion there, in the very act of hitting out at God's people? We often speak, without God having told us to speak.

The Bible says, "*Let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger - because the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God*" (*Jas.1:19,20*).

When we see a problem in our home or our church that needs to be sorted out, what do we do? Do we speak and act quickly, without waiting on the Lord? If so, then it is no wonder that we fail and bring confusion into our home and into the church.

It is at such times that we must remember that our anger cannot achieve the righteousness of God. When we are not at rest in our hearts, but agitated with another, *the best thing we can do is keep quiet*. That way we will at least not do any damage to God's work.

It is a serious thing to be a servant of God. We cannot take such a responsibility lightly. God's servants have tremendous authority. But they have to be extremely watchful that they are obedient to God in the smallest thing - especially in their speech.

Once when Moses' sister Miriam had criticized him, he kept quiet and did not reply. The Holy Spirit's approval of Moses' reaction is found in His recording there that Moses "*was more humble than any man who was on the face of the earth*" (*Num.12:3*). On another occasion, when Korah gathered others in rebellion against Moses and questioned his authority, again Moses did not get provoked, but fell on his face and kept quiet (*Num.16:4*). Why didn't he keep quiet at Meribah, when the people rebelled against him? Why did he have to speak rashly towards the tail-end of his life?

Patience is the *primary* mark of a servant of God (*2 Tim.2:24*) - and of an apostle (*2 Cor.12:12*). We can be patient for a long time and keep falling on our faces again and again. But the question is whether we will keep on "*entrusting our cause to Him Who judges righteously*" until the end of our lives, or whether we will begin to justify and defend ourselves, after we have endured for some years (*1 Pet.2:23*). God will never allow us to be tried or tested by anyone at any time, beyond our ability (*1 Cor.10:13*). But He will allow us to be tested to the limit of our strength. He *will* however give us grace to be patient, if we are willing to die to ourselves, our rights and our reputation.

May God help us all to be men who will fall on our faces, when we are insulted and badly treated - today, tomorrow, next week, next month, next year, and until the end of our lives.

Moses would have entered Canaan if he had fallen on his face at Meribah. He missed so much by being careless at just one point towards the end of his life. There have been many other servants of God like that, who lived in faithfulness for many years, and then became careless and slipped up towards the end of their lives. Thus they ruined God's plan for their lives.

On an earlier occasion, we read that God had punished the Israelites with the same punishment that He gave Moses - not being permitted to enter Canaan. But they had rebelled against God *TEN TIMES* (*Num.14:22*). God gave the Israelites *ten* chances, before punishing them. But He gave Moses only *ONE* chance. Why? Because God expected more from Moses than from the Israelites.

The Israelites had seen only God's external *actions*, but Moses had understood God's *ways*, having spoken with God face to face (*Psa.103:6*). If we represent God and preach His word, He will expect ten times more from us than from others in our church.

God's servants cannot be careless in their speech, even when they are provoked. Only when they learn to eliminate worthless words from their speech, can they become God's spokesmen (*Jer.15:19*).

The Importance Of Total Obedience

Saul was another man whom God chose to lead Israel. Saul never wanted to be a king. It was God Who placed him on the throne of Israel. And when the Israelites came to make him king, Saul hid himself, saying, "*Who am I to be the king? My family is the least of all the families of Israel*" (*1 Sam.10:21,22*). What a humble man he was!

But it wasn't long before Saul became big in his own eyes and God had to take away the anointing from him.

In *1 Samuel 15*, we read that Saul modified God's commands and did not kill *everything* of Amalek, as God had commanded him to. He followed his own reason, and did what pleased the people. This is what happens when anyone becomes big in his own eyes. And here we see *two* of the greatest snares that every servant of God faces - *the opinion of his own reason and the opinion of other people*. Saul lost his anointing because he allowed himself to be influenced by these two factors. We have no right to modify any of God's commands according to our own wisdom. And if we seek to please men, we "*cannot be servants of Christ*" (*Gal.1:10*).

If Saul had remained small in his own eyes, he would have retained the anointing until the end of his life. But he began to love his throne. And that is how many another servant of God has lost his anointing too. *Standing repeatedly before people, as God's spokesmen, has a way of going to our heads, if we are not watchful.*

But Saul did not only cling on to being king. When he saw an anointed younger brother (David) coming up, and others having confidence in him, he schemed to suppress him. He was jealous of David, because David had a faith that Saul did not have. And he wanted to kill David because the people admired him.

But does God ignore the actions of such Sauls - who stick to their thrones, even after God has rejected them? For a long time God may spare them. In Saul's case, God spared him for 13 years. David was about 17 years old when he killed Goliath. But he became king only when he was 30. For 13 years after David had been anointed by God, God allowed Saul to continue to rule as Israel's king.

What lesson does all of this have for us?

God may allow us, even after we have become backsliders, to stay on in a ministry, *long after we have lost the anointing of the Spirit.*

Others may *not* recognise that we have lost the anointing, because of their lack of discernment. So they may continue to accept us as servants of God, because they respect our age or Bible knowledge or experience. But we must not imagine that such acceptance by the people is sufficient for us to remain as God's servants.

What is the use of man accepting us if God Himself has rejected us? It is a terrible tragedy when a

man continues to serve the Lord or to lead a church, even after the anointing has gone from his life.

Avoiding Hasty Actions

Unfortunately David, when he became king, also modified God's commands. And God had to punish him too. There is no partiality with God. God is strict with all who serve Him.

In *2 Samuel 6*, we see how even good intentions cannot save us from missing God's will, if we are not exact with God's Word. David was taking the ark back to Jerusalem - which was a good thing. But he didn't do it the way God had commanded in the Law. God had commanded the Levites to carry the ark on their shoulders. But David modified that command and placed the ark on a cart and let the oxen pull the cart. There he was imitating the Philistines who had adopted that method a few years earlier (*1 Sam.6:8-12*).

There are Christian leaders doing the same thing today. They run their churches according to the management techniques of worldly businesses rather than according to the teachings of God's Word.

As the oxen carried the ark, they stumbled. When Uzzah saw that, he reached out his hand and held the ark, to prevent it from falling. And God killed Uzzah, immediately "*for his irreverence*" (v.7).

It is sad, but true, that when God's shepherds make a mistake, the sheep suffer too. David had made a mistake and Uzzah suffered for it. And David learnt there that God is very strict with His servants.

Uzzah had the best of intentions. Yet "*the anger of the Lord burned against Uzzah*" (v.7). Uzzah had been taught from childhood that only the Levites could touch the ark. But he took God's commandment lightly in that moment and suffered for it.

The error of Uzzah can be repeated today. When we see things going wrong in our church, we can reach out our hands "*to steady God's ark*". And God may smite us, because even though our intentions may have been good, we went outside our "*boundaries*". We may have done what our *reason* told us was right. But we did not wait on the Lord to find out His will. We acted in haste.

Jesus said, "*I will build my Church*" (*Matt.16:18*). Building the church is the Lord's business, not ours. He has never delegated that task to any of us. So when we say, "*I am building the church in such-and-such a place*", that is arrogant conceit. If ever we begin to think that the Body of Christ is our own private business, we will certainly make the mistake that Uzzah made, one day or the other.

If we see the church shaking, let us go to God and tell Him, "*Lord, YOU are building the church, not me. Preserve Your church.*"

And when we feel that things are not going as they should, let us ask ourselves whose work it is and who is in charge of it. Is it the Holy Spirit or we?

At times, we may feel that something has to be done *immediately*. But if we act without listening to the Holy Spirit, we will always act in the flesh. And our actions, even if done with good intentions, will cause more confusion than if we had done nothing. So we must say, "*Lord, You are in charge here. The government is on Your shoulders. And I want to listen to You. Tell me what YOU want me to do.*"

There are many types of fools described in the book of *Proverbs*. But finally, *the greatest fool of all* is described thus, "*Do you see a man who is HASTY in his words (or his matters)? There is more hope for a fool than for him*" (*Prov.29:20*).

The one who is hasty - hasty to say something or to do something - feels absolutely confident that he knows what is best for any situation. He doesn't have to consult God at all. He can act on his own. Such a man is the greatest fool in the world.

It was prophesied about Jesus that, "*He will delight in the fear of the Lord and He will not judge by what His eyes see or His ears hear*" (*Isa.11:3*). Jesus could not avoid seeing many things because His eyes were not blind. Neither could He avoid hearing many things because He was not deaf. But He feared His Father so much that He would never *make a judgment or form an opinion* merely on the basis of what He saw or heard. As He once said of Himself, "*The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father doing*" (*Jn.5:19*).

When the Pharisees came to Jesus with the woman caught in adultery, Jesus did not reply to their question for some time. He was waiting to hear from His Father. When He heard, He spoke. It was just

one sentence: *“Let him who is without sin cast the first stone”*. *That accomplished more than an hour-long sermon would have done!*

When someone comes to us with a complicated problem, if we give him advice based on our cleverness and our past experience, the problem may only become more complicated. But one word of wisdom from the Father can work wonders.

And so the next time we see *“the oxen stumbling and the ark about to fall”*, let us not be eager to put our names at the top of the list of fools!! Let us not be quick to judge by what our eyes see and what our ears hear, and act in irreverence. Instead, let us put our faces in the dust before the Lord and say, *“Lord, I lack wisdom here. What do You want me to do?”*

It is so difficult to acknowledge that we lack wisdom, especially when we know that the others in the church are younger and more immature than us. But if we humbly acknowledge our need, God will give us wisdom in abundance.

Keeping Our Word

We see yet another example of God’s strictness with His servants in *2 Samuel 21:1*. During the days of David’s kingship, there was a famine in Israel, for three continuous years. When there is a famine of the prophetic word in our assembly like that, it is good for us to do what David did. He sought the Lord for an answer. And the Lord said *“This is because, many years ago, Israel broke the promise that she had made to the Gibeonites”*.

Israel had promised the Gibeonites 300 years earlier, in Joshua’s time, that their descendants would never be harmed. But Saul had broken that promise and killed some of them, when he was king. The punishment for that sin caught up with Israel only 30 years later. God keeps His accounts very carefully. Nothing is forgotten of the wrongs that we have done, if we have not settled the matters righteously. God may take 30 years to settle His accounts with us. But they will be settled one day. God did not remove the famine from Israel until the matter was settled.

All who serve God must be very careful with the words they speak, not only in the meetings, but also outside the meetings.

We should not promise to do something for someone and then forget about it. For example, we should not promise to pray for people (who ask us to pray for them), and then forget to do so.

If we are unable to pray for the many who ask us to pray for them, then we must be honest and tell them, *“I will pray for you when I remember to.”* Or alternatively pray for them then and there. But we should never make promises that we cannot keep.

How can we speak God’s word solemnly if we make promises to others lightly? If we are unable to do something that we promised to do, we must go to that person and explain why we could not keep our word, and ask for his forgiveness. It is serious to break a promise.

“Every idle word that men speak they will give an account in the day of judgment” (Matt.12:36).

God takes the promises we make to others quite seriously. We have no right to break our word, even to unbelievers or to servants (as the Gibeonites were).

We may imagine that since no punishment has come upon us for a long time, that God has forgotten about the unrighteousness we did somewhere, that has remained unsettled. But God never forgets. God’s judgments may be slow in coming, but they will come finally.

“Therefore let us offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.” (Heb.12:28,29).

CHAPTER THREE

THE LORD REBUKES THE ELDERS

Revelation chapters 2 and 3, are good chapters for us to read because they contain the Lord's messages to the elder brothers (messengers) of churches. The Lord *publicly* rebuked the backslidden elders in five of the seven churches. He did not send "*Personal and Confidential*" letters to them through the apostle John, but letters that were to be read out to all the believers in those churches.

Ephesus - No Devotion To The Lord

The elder in Ephesus was rebuked, not for falling into some gross sin, but for losing that fervent devotion for the Lord that he had had in earlier days (*Rev.2:1-5*). Perhaps he was now so taken up with preaching sermons every Sunday, that he had forgotten all about devotion to the Lord in his personal life. This was a serious error.

Satan always seeks to turn us away from "*simple devotion to Christ*" to something *secondary* (*2 Cor.11:3*). When our work for the Lord becomes more important to us than the Lord Himself, we have already started backsliding. All our labours for the Lord must flow out of our personal relationship with Him. *Otherwise they will have no spiritual value*. They will be but *dead works* and social service.

Whenever *anything* becomes more important to us *than the Lord Himself*, we can no longer be servants of the *NEW* covenant - *for the new covenant emphasises A RELATIONSHIP WITH the Lord, unlike the old covenant that emphasised SERVICE FOR the Lord*. If we have not understood this difference, we can never build the Body of Christ.

Pergamum - Worldly Teaching Tolerated

The elder in Pergamum was rebuked for allowing people to teach doctrines that led the church into worldliness and into a lax attitude towards sin (*Rev.2:14,15*). He himself may have been a good man. But he permitted others to teach *Balaam's doctrine*. So he was guilty.

The Lord holds elders responsible to ensure that no preaching is permitted in the church that leads people to take sin lightly. There is "*a doctrine that leads to godliness*" (to a godly, Christ-like life), and that alone is "*hygienic teaching*" (*1 Tim.6:3 - margin*). Every other teaching is unhygienic to a greater or lesser degree.

Why did this elder permit such lax teachings in his church? Probably he never corrected the brothers and sisters for anything, because he wanted a reputation as a *humble* and *gentle* brother. If so, he sought his own honour more than the good of the church.

"*Humility*" and "*gentleness*" are virtues that we must learn from the example of Jesus, as He Himself told us to do (*Matt. 11:29*). Otherwise we can get a false understanding of what they mean.

Jesus' humility and gentleness did not prevent Him from driving the money changers out of the temple, or from rebuking Peter with strong words such as, "*Get behind me Satan*", when Peter preached a false doctrine, *that Jesus should avoid the cross* (*Matt.16:22,23*).

Satan can use even a *good* brother like Peter to lead the church astray. For that brother may speak in the meetings in such a way as to *dilute the word of the cross*. Such preaching must always be recognised as the voice of Satan - for thus Satan can turn the church away from the direction that God wants it to take.

One of the greatest responsibilities we have as elders of churches, is to determine the direction that our church should take. It must not be the direction of worldliness and compromise. Neither must it be the direction of Pharisaism and legalism. *But it must be the way of the cross - the direction of the will of God*.

Balaam-like preachers usually have great *soul-power* and can have an unhealthy influence on people in a church. Preachers who have a powerful human personality invariably overwhelm others, and hinder them from being connected to Christ as their Head. They also influence others in such a way as to lead them away from true spirituality, into superficial, worldly religiosity

When a preacher has not understood what it is to put his soul-power to death, he will connect believers to *himself*, and not to Christ the Head. The believers will admire and follow the preacher, but they will never overcome sin or the world in their lives.

There is a vast difference between *spiritual power* and *soul-power*, and we must be able to discern between the two. A person may have a lot of Bible-knowledge and a gift to speak. He may even be very

hospitable to the brothers and sisters, and help them in many practical ways. But if he connects people to *himself* and not to Christ, he will be a hindrance to the building of the Body of Christ.

Balaam-like preachers are happy to receive gifts from others (*Num.22:15-17*). A gift can blind our eyes (*Prov.17:8*), and make us obligated to men, so that we become their slaves. That can hinder us from speaking the truth of God and correcting our benefactors.

A servant of God must always remain free. "*You have been bought with a price. Do not become the servants of men.*" (*1 Cor.7:23*)

The teaching of Balaam flourished in the church in Pergamum because the elder there had become a slave of men.

Balaam's teaching has two parts to it. Peter mentions both of them in *2 Pet.2:14,15* - *covetousness and adultery*.

Jesus said that *the one who loves money HATES GOD, and the one who clings on to money DESPISES GOD* (*Read Lk.16:13 carefully*).

If we don't teach that clearly, the teaching of Balaam will flourish in our church, and the brothers and sisters will be lovers of money.

But if we are to teach what Jesus taught, *we* must first be freed from the grip of money *ourselves*. It is easier to be freed from anger and from lusting with the eyes, than to be freed from the grip of money? Only through constant battle can we overcome this evil.

Have we seen the love of money as "*a root of all sorts of evil*" (*1 Tim.6:10*)? While anger and lusting with the eyes are recognised as evils, the love of money is not. And thus many are enslaved to money, little realising that thereby *they hate and despise God*.

The vast majority of so-called "*full-time workers*" in India, are enslaved to the love of money, like Balaam. They visit the homes of rich believers, because they know that they will get gifts from them. And thus their mouths are shut when these rich and influential people have to be rebuked for their sins. They travel to preach in churches where they know they will receive handsome offerings. How can such preachers ever serve God? That is impossible. They are serving Mammon. Jesus said that no one could serve two masters.

There are three *essential qualifications* for anyone who wants to be a servant of God, under the new covenant:

(1) *He must be freed from sin in his personal life* (*Rom.6:22*).

(2) *He must not seek to please men* (*Gal.1:10*).

(3) *He must hate and despise money* (*Lk.16:13*).

We must check our lives constantly in these three areas to see whether we qualify to be servants of the new covenant or not.

Money and material things must have *NO* hold on our lives, if we are to be effective for God.

We must also *hate to receive gifts*, for Jesus said that "*there is more blessing in GIVING than in RECEIVING*" (*Acts 20:35*).

If we don't break free from the grip of money in our lives, we will never be able to love God or to serve Him, as we should. And we won't be able to lead others to love God. And we won't be able to deliver them from the teaching of Balaam.

The second aspect of the teaching of Balaam is *immorality*. This teaching encourages brothers and sisters to mingle freely with each other, without any restraint. We read in Revelation 2:14, that it was Balaam who encouraged the Moabite girls to mingle freely with the Israeli young men. This led to such immorality among the Israelites, that God slew 24,000 in a single day (*Num.25:1-9*)

Only when Phinehas lifted up a spear and put a stop to it, did God's anger against Israel cease. When God saw Phinehas's action, He was so pleased that he gave him the covenant of an everlasting priesthood (*Num.25:11-13*). *God always honours those who are radical against the loose mingling of brothers and sisters in the church.*

Here again, as elders, we must be examples, by our personal conduct. We must be serious in our

behaviour with sisters and avoid *all flippant and unnecessary conversation* with them. We must be especially wary of those sisters who always want to speak *to us*. If we love to talk to the sisters, we are unfit to lead God's church. We must *NEVER* speak to women alone in a closed room. It is always best to counsel sisters along with one's wife, or with another elder brother.

When the disciples saw Jesus speaking to a woman at the well in Samaria, it is written that "*they marveled that He had been speaking with a woman*" (John 4:27) - because Jesus usually never spoke to a woman alone. He was careful not to do anything that had *even the appearance of evil*. Here is the example for all of us to follow.

Thyatira - A Woman Running The Church

The Lord rebuked the elder at Thyatira for allowing a woman, Jezebel, (*his "wife" - Rev.2:20 margin*), to have such a strong influence in the affairs of the church that many brothers were being led astray. There are servants of God like that even today, who cannot restrain their wives and other sisters from interfering in church matters.

God has not called women to have *any part* in the leadership of new-covenant churches. That is taught clearly in *1 Timothy 2:12*. But there are strong sisters everywhere who would like to have an influence in the running of their churches. All such women are Jezebels. Sisters are called to be "*workers at home*" (*Tit.2:5*). But if they begin to have a say in church matters, then there will be confusion in the church. An elder's wife can influence her husband so powerfully at home that all that he says in the elders' meetings will be but an echo of what she has drummed into his head at home!!

Elders like that are *effeminate* and totally unfit to be servants of God. Such elders must be categorised as *women*, and are therefore unfit to hold any positions of leadership in the church.

Sardis - Living On One's Reputation

The Lord rebuked the elder in Sardis for being a hypocrite. He had a name before people that he was alive, when in reality, he was spiritually dead. There were a few however in the assembly in Sardis who were wholehearted and zealous, who had kept their garments pure. It is indeed a sad state of affairs when other brothers in the assembly are more God-fearing than the elder.

The elder in Sardis may have got a name for himself through his preaching and through testifying to the great things God had done through him. We may experience wonderful miracles in our ministry. But there is a real danger when we begin to speak about them.

If you look at the example of Jesus, you will notice that He never spoke about such matters. He never testified anywhere about the miracles that He had done elsewhere. He preached God's Word and never spoke about what the Father had done through Him. All His righteousness and His works were done in secret before His Father.

Jesus must have had some amazing experiences with His Father, during the 30 years that He spent in Nazareth. But He never spoke one word about any of them. He knew that they were all to be kept secret. He never sought to make a name for Himself before others. Let us make Jesus our Example in this matter too.

When we give a testimony, it is very easy for dishonesty and exaggeration to creep in. We may tell others about someone who was healed through our prayer, for example, but never tell them about *the hundred others whom we prayed for who were not healed*. In such cases, we are not speaking the whole truth.

We must be thoroughly honest if we are to be the Lord's servants. Others must *never* get a better impression of us than what we actually are. It is far better if they think less of us.

And those who boast of spiritual gifts that they don't really have, are like deceptive clouds that don't bring the needed rain (*Prov.25:14*).

Are you really such a great man of faith as you have made yourself out to be to others? Consider the times when you have been anxious. Were you such a great man of faith then? Does your wife (who knows you better than anyone else) consider you to be a great man of faith? Most elders who have a name before others do not have much of a name before their own wives, who know them as they really are!!

Why are we afraid to let others see us as we really are? Isn't it because we want to appear superior to them? And when we do confess our failures, do we confess only "holy sins" such as the fact that we are not praying enough or not fasting enough etc.?

Such confessions are hypocritical and are only designed to *increase* one's reputation! All such hypocritical elders need to repent.

We must also remember that we will always produce children exactly like ourselves. It says about Adam that "*he became the father of a son in HIS OWN LIKENESS*" (*Gen.5:3*). There are weaknesses in our bloodstream that others are not able to see, except under a powerful microscope. But we still transmit them to our children.

It is the same spiritually. There can be areas of failure in our lives that others may never see. But over a period of time, we will find that our spiritual children have got the same weaknesses too.

Every church finally becomes like its leader. That is why the seven letters in *Revelation 2 and 3* are first of all addressed to the messengers of the churches, and then it says, "*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says TO THE CHURCHES*".

If we are secretly dishonest, we will ultimately produce dishonest brothers and sisters. If we are secretly lustful or miserly, that is how others in our church will finally turn out to be as well. The only exceptions will be those who have the discernment to see through our carnality and who do not follow our example.

There were some wholehearted young believers like that in Sardis, who did not become like their elder, because they saw through his carnality and did not follow his example.

One of the greatest deceptions that we can be in, is to imagine that we are building the true church, when we are motivated by the spirit of Babylon - *to make a name for ourselves*.

The origin of Babylon (the false church described in *Revelation 17 & 18*) is found in the tower of Babel.

At Babel, the people said to one another, "*Let us build something that will get us a name*" (*Gen.11:4*) That is the essence of Babylon.

Has God prospered our work? Have we got a name for ourselves through our work for the Lord? Then there can come all unconsciously a feeling in our hearts that we have been faithful, unlike others who have been unfaithful. One of the easiest ways to go down into spiritual death is through such self-congratulation.

That is how Nebuchadnezzar fell, and began to behave like an animal. Read *Daniel 4* and meditate on it, for it has a much-needed message for us all. There Nebuchadnezzar thought within himself, "*Is this not Babylon which I myself have built?*" (*Dan.4:30*). Notice there that he didn't *say* that to anyone. He only had such thoughts *in his heart*. But God judged him immediately and made him insane.

That is how many preachers and elders have fallen from grace through the centuries. He who has ears to hear let him hear - and let him beware lest the same fate befall him too.

How will God humble a servant of His who has such high thoughts about himself and about his labours for the Lord?

He will begin to discover carnality within his own heart and in his church. He will find himself defeated in his thought-life, and loving money. There will be friction between some of the brothers in the church. The family-lives of many in the church will begin to deteriorate. There will be no spirit of prophecy in the church, even after many years. The meetings will be dull and boring. No leadership will develop in the church apart from the lone elder at the top!!

Seeing all this, the elder will begin to realise that there is not much spiritual content either in him or in his church. Perhaps his assembly has grown in numbers, but not spiritually. On the contrary, there is every evidence of spiritual death.

Most elders, when they see such things, will conceal them from others, and pretend that everything is all right in the church. And thus they will degenerate and become exactly like the elder in Sardis.

We don't have to wait many years to discover such things. God can give us discernment, so that we

see these things in ourselves and in the church very quickly. But God will give us discernment only if we seek His honour alone, and don't care for the honour of men.

We must remember that God is not impressed by the *numerical* growth of a church, if it is not growing *spiritually*.

Paul told the Christians at Corinth that God would humble *him*, through their carnal state (*Read 2 Cor.12:20,21*). Why should *Paul* feel humiliated by the carnality of the Corinthians?

Because Paul was their spiritual father. And God holds fathers responsible for the spiritual state of their children.

When we see carnality in our assembly, God is showing us *our own* failure as leaders. We are the ones who should humble ourselves then, instead of blaming the brothers and sisters. When we see worldliness in our children, God is showing us our failure as fathers. We must humble ourselves, instead of blaming our children.

If we are hirelings, we will criticise the brothers and sisters when we see their failings. But if we are men of God, we will humble ourselves and say, "*Lord I have failed. Forgive me.*"

Paul had a great burden that the heathen whom he had brought to Christ should be "*so sanctified that they could be offered up as pure offering to God*" (*Rom.15:16*).

Under the old covenant, the priest had to examine every sacrifice that the people brought, to see that it was without any blemish (*Deut.17:1*). That was the priest's responsibility. He could not offer to God what was maimed in any way. (*Read Malachi 1 and 2* to understand how serious a sin that was in God's eyes).

Now under the new covenant, all those whom the Lord calls to His service in the church have the same task. The *people* they present to God must be acceptable to Him. That was why Paul laboured "*to present EVERY man perfect in Christ*" (*Col.1:28*).

At the judgment seat of Christ, everything will become manifest. What profit will it be to us even if everyone thinks we are doing a great work for God, if in that day it is seen that all our labours were shallow and carnal? The elder in Sardis was foolish to be satisfied with man's honour.

Do we desire to get a name *for ourselves* - through our children? Maybe it's going well with them. Praise the Lord for that. But do we want others to notice that, so that we get some glory from it ourselves? Do we want others to know what wonderful fathers we have been? Are we bringing up our children for our own glory or God's?

Certainly, we all want to bring up our children to be wholehearted Christians. But shouldn't it be enough *if God sees that*? And if God has seen it why do we want any man's approval?

What does it matter even if others think our children are worldly? We have to answer to God alone ultimately.

It is good to have a sober estimate of ourselves and of our church.

There is a great lust in the flesh to show others the result of our labours. If we don't put that lust to death, Satan will always take advantage of us. Wherever he sees the slightest desire in any elder's heart to get a name for himself, Satan will take advantage of him, and deceive him, even while he is preaching about discipleship, holiness and the Body of Christ.

Such an elder will build only another *branch-church of Babylon!*

It is impossible to build the Body of Christ, if we are seeking a name for ourselves. The only one who can build a new covenant church is the one who has no desire for name or fame among men.

If there are only 3 wholehearted disciples in your church after many years of labour, because you refused to make the narrow gate any wider than a needle's eye, you don't have to be ashamed of that. God will say to you one day, "*Well done, good and faithful servant*".

It is far better to have 3 disciples in a town who are a pure *testimony* for Christ, than 3000 compromisers through whom the Name of the Lord is blasphemed.

But when our numbers are small, we can be tempted strongly *to lower our standards*, in order to impress others with better statistics. If we don't battle that lust, we will end up like the elder in Sardis.

I want to add a word of warning here however, to those leaders who may find a *false comfort* in these

words.

It is possible that your church is not growing in numbers, because God Himself cannot recommend it to other needy people.

It is the Lord Who adds to the church (*Acts 2:47*). And in the early days, He did add large numbers to the church (*Acts 6:7*).

It may be good for you to pray something like this: “*Lord, we are not asking You to increase the numbers in our church with a multitude of compromisers. But we do pray for ALL those in this town, who are seeking to live a godly life. Lord, please do one of these three things: (1) LEAD THEM TO US so that we can help them; or (2) LEAD US TO THEM; or (3) SHOW US WHY YOU CAN’T RECOMMEND US to them.*”

The Lord may then tell you that He cannot recommend your church to others, because it is so legalistic and cold and Pharisaical!! He may also tell you that the reason why your church is like that is because you *yourself* are like that as an elder!!

Then the only thing for you to do is to *mourn and repent*.

If we want to be free from seeking the honour and approval of men in our ministry, the only way to do that is by building up a bridal relationship with the Lord. In *The Song of Solomon*, the bride speaks of her life and work as a garden that produces fruit for her Bridegroom alone (*Song 4:16b*). When our goal is to satisfy our heavenly Bridegroom alone, then our heart will be at rest, at all times.

We will rest content in knowing that our Lord has accepted us *just as we are*, with all our limitations. We will realise that He does not expect us to have a ministry like anyone else. Thus we will be free from the spirit of competition that is rife in Christendom. We will also be free from the lust to report the results of our work to others.

The Lord has given us the gifts that are necessary for our *unique contribution* to the Body of Christ, and He has given us a specific task to complete. We are to fulfil that task to the best of our ability, by His grace and power, and we are not to let anyone else know about what we are doing for Him - just like a bride does not want anyone else to know the things that she does secretly for her bridegroom!

So, let us build a bridal relationship with our Lord, lest we end up like the elder in Sardis.

Laodicea - Not Knowing One’s Wretchedness

The elder in Laodicea was rebuked strongly by the Lord for a number of reasons.

He felt he was rich and increased with goods and had need of nothing. Riches are *not* related only to money. One can be rich in knowledge, gifts and talents too - and thus feel self-sufficient.

Those who are intelligent, eloquent and gifted need to walk with fear, because they are in constant danger of being proud of these human abilities and of depending more on them than on the Lord.

The elder here was satisfied with his Bible-knowledge, his gifts, his achievements, and his position as an elder. But he was not aware of the fact that in God’s eyes, he was still spiritually “*wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked*” (*Rev.3:17*). It is sad indeed when we are ignorant of our true spiritual condition, as God sees us.

While this elder brother was totally ignorant of the fact that he was a *wretched man*, we find a godly man like the apostle Paul crying out and saying, “*O wretched man that I am*” (*Rom. 7:24*).

How did Paul know his own *wretchedness* and the Laodicean elder not know his? Because Paul *lived before God’s face*, while the Laodicean elder did not. In God’s light, Paul *constantly* realised that his flesh was corrupt (*Rom.7:18*). Thus Paul remained *constantly* poor in spirit, and *became a godly man*. The Laodicean elder however, not seeing the wretchedness of his flesh, *became carnal and lukewarm*.

It is very easy for self-satisfaction and self-sufficiency to come into the life of a servant of God, if he does not live before God’s face - for he will not see his own need. And evidence of this will be seen *in the way he speaks and preaches*. The way a needy person speaks is quite different from the way a strong self-sufficient person speaks.

There are gifted preachers who can speak well, who are eloquent, and who know the doctrine well. But if you listen to their spirit when they speak, you will be able to sense an arrogance there. They speak

as experts, and not as those who are poor and needy themselves.

The Body of Christ cannot be built by men who have a strong, arrogant spirit, but only by men who have a humble, gentle spirit.

It is easy for an arrogant preacher to whip people in his sermons!! Then he becomes like the servant Jesus spoke of, whose master had appointed him to give others their daily ration of food. But instead of giving them food, he whipped them (*Lk.12:45*)! Unfortunately, there is a lot of whipping that goes on from the pulpit in Christendom today. Whipping never leads anyone to a godly life, but only to feelings of condemnation, and to subservience to the preacher who whips him.

Consider how a poor, helpless beggar speaks to anyone. It is always with *meekness and respect* - because he knows that he is a nobody in the world. That is how the Bible tells us to speak to all human beings, *for we too are nobodies in the world (1 Pet.3:15)*. On the other hand, how does a dictator speak? Always with arrogance.

Does our speech come from poverty of spirit or from arrogance?

1 Peter 2:17 commands us to "*honour all men*". Is there a single human being on earth who is excluded from that command? No.

A brother who is not eloquent, and who does not know much of the Word, but who has a humble, gentle spirit, will build the Body of Christ far more than an arrogant brother who is gifted and eloquent.

The gifted brother may look like a spiritual man here on earth, and others may even consider him to be a great asset to the church. But at the judgment seat of Christ it will be seen that it was the humbler brother who actually built the Body of Christ.

It is essential that we realise that the Body of Christ is built, not by Bible-knowledge and spiritual gifts *primarily, but by our life*.

Only the poor in spirit can build the kingdom of God (*Matt.5:3*). And there is only one way to remain poor in spirit (aware of our own spiritual need) constantly, and that is, *by looking at Jesus always*.

When we see ourselves in His light, we will realise how unlike Him we are, even if we are better than others around us. In His light, we will lose sight of the weaknesses of others, and see only our own. And we shall *spontaneously* say, "*Oh, wretched man that I am*" (*Rom.7:24*). We won't have to be prompted by anyone to say it.

But we must live in that state always. Otherwise we can easily backslide into the deep pit of lukewarmness, carnality and arrogant pride that the Laodicean elder was in.

Under the old covenant, the high-priest could go into the Most Holy Place only once a year. He could see the glory of God, and his own wretchedness in that glory only once a year. But now that the new and living way has been opened by Jesus (*Heb.10:20*), we can live in the Most Holy Place, in the presence of God all the time - and see the wretchedness of our flesh *all the time*, like Paul did.

The old covenant prophets could see the glory of God only once in a while. When Isaiah saw it, he cried out saying, "*Woe is me, for I am ruined*" (*Isa.6:5*). But now we have the privilege of getting that revelation continuously. We can constantly cry "*Woe is me*", instead of pronouncing woes on others!! Those who live in the Spirit will see their need constantly and remain poor in spirit at all times.

Only a man who is poor in spirit is really spiritually wealthy in God's eyes. And when such a man speaks to us, either in personal conversation or in a meeting, we can partake of his spiritual wealth.

An eloquent preacher who is not poor in spirit however, can only show us *pictures* of wealth. He cannot make us actually wealthy.

We must give the poor in spirit the most prominent places of ministry in our assembly - and not the most gifted ones. Gifted brothers, who are not poor in spirit, can destroy the church.

The church cannot be destroyed by adulterers and thieves - because these people are such obvious sinners that everyone can recognise them as such. But the church can be destroyed by eloquent preachers and gifted teachers who, like the Laodicean elder, have no sense of their own need, and who yet preach about holiness.

If we are unable to discern between those who are poor in spirit and those who are arrogant in spirit,

the reason could be that we ourselves are not poor in spirit. As elders, if we don't see our own need first, how can we ever help others to see their need?

Oh how we need to pray that God will give us light on ourselves first, if we are to keep our assemblies pure for the Lord.

Hearing the Lord Directly

It is sad to note that these five elders were so deaf that they could not hear the Lord speak to them directly. The Lord had to rebuke them through the apostle John. Why was that necessary in the new covenant age? It was only under the old covenant that people had to hear God's message through a prophet. If these elder brothers had been humble and God-fearing, they could have heard God speaking directly to them, without John having to write to them.

And after these elders got these letters from John, we don't know whether they repented or not. We can only hope they did. I wonder if the elder in Thyatira told his wife to mind her own business and to keep her nose out of church matters. Or did *she* tell her husband not to bother about John's letter?

If these five elders did accept the Lord's rebukes through John, then it must certainly have gone well with them.

We *do* know however that at least one elder in another church did *not* accept what John wrote. John writes in *3 John* about Diotrephes, who loved his position as an elder, and who would not accept John's correction (*3 Jn.9*).

If we are to serve the Lord, we must see ourselves at all times *as the Lord sees us* - and not as our brothers see us. God's Word can protect us from every spiritual danger, if we live before God's face constantly and listen to the voice of His Spirit - either when He speaks to us directly or when He speaks to us through another brother.

Finally, remember that *the Lord never rebukes us to condemn us for our past failures, but always to give us a better future.*

CHAPTER FOUR

AN EXAMPLE FOR OTHERS TO FOLLOW

John the Baptist was the greatest prophet under the old covenant. But Jesus said that the least one in the new covenant would be able to rise to greater heights than John (*Matt.11:11*). This is an amazing calling indeed - to be greater than John the Baptist.

Ministry under the *new* covenant is a vastly higher calling than ministry under the *old* covenant. There are many things that we can learn from the lives of old-covenant servants of God, like Moses, Elijah and John the Baptist. But while they served God, following *commandments*, today we are to serve God, following an *Example*.

Jesus is now our Example of what it means to be a servant of God. How did Jesus become our High Priest? Not through His miraculous ministry, but by His being "*made in all things like unto us, His brethren*" (*Heb.2:17*), and becoming an example for us.

Jesus said that the Father had given Him "*authority over all mankind*" (*Jn.17:2*). Why was that authority given? In the same verse Jesus tells us that it was in order "*to give eternal life to those whom the Father gave Him*". "*Eternal life*" does not mean a life that never ends, but "*a life that had no beginning and has no end*". In other words, it describes the life of God or the Divine nature.

The old covenant servants of God like Moses, Joshua, Samson, David etc., had authority to rule over Israel and to overcome their human enemies. But under the new covenant, God's servants are given authority to lead others *to partake of the Divine nature (eternal life), and to enable them to overcome the lusts in their flesh.*

Our authority in the church is to lead the brothers and sisters to become like Jesus Who manifested the Divine nature in every situation in His earthly life. We have no other authority than that. If we are *not* exercising our authority to lead others to partake of the Divine nature, we have to consider ourselves as failures.

Unfortunately many Christian leaders today are like old covenant servants of God, *ruling* over the people. Jesus and the apostles however were servants of all men.

Which covenant are we living under - the old or the new?

Jesus is called our Forerunner (*Heb.6:20*). He went the same way that we have to go, ahead of us. We are exhorted to “*run the race looking unto Jesus...Who also endured the cross*” (*Heb.12:1,2*). He was “*tempted in every point as we are, and did not sin*” (*Heb.4:15*), so that we might “*follow in His steps Who committed no sin*” (*1 Pet.2:21,22*).

Jesus faced all our temptations so that He could be an Example for us to follow. That is why His word is so powerful, when He says, “*Follow Me*”. Now, as shepherds of God’s flock, we also have to lead the flock along the same way. We must also be able to say to others as Paul said, “*Be followers of me, just as I follow Christ.....Follow my example*” (*1 Cor.11:1; Phil.3:17*).

Many preachers say, “Don’t follow me. Just follow Christ.” That sounds such a humble statement, that we could be impressed. But it is *unScriptural*, for none of the apostles ever made such a statement. They always exhorted others to follow them as they followed Christ.

Jesus is the Chief Shepherd and we are under-shepherds of God’s flock. Even so, Jesus is the Forerunner, and we are called to be *mini-forerunners* to others in the church. We have to go the same way as He went. Having become overcomers ourselves, we can exhort others “*to overcome even as we also have overcome*” (*Rev.3:21*).

The Secret Of New-Covenant Ministry

Paul reveals the secret of his effective ministry in these words: “*God strengthens us in all our afflictions, so that we may be able to strengthen those who are in affliction WITH THE SAME STRENGTH WITH WHICH WE ARE STRENGTHENED BY GOD*” (*2 Cor.1:4*).

Paul had to go through many afflictions in order to receive a spiritual education. Only thus could he pass on to others the strength that he himself had received when he went through trials. Without such an education, no one can be a servant of the new covenant.

There is a vast difference between an anointed Samson under the old covenant and an anointed Paul under the new covenant. Samson had the Spirit’s power to overcome external lions. Paul however had the Spirit’s power to overcome the lions that dwelt within his own flesh - which Samson could not overcome.

Under the old covenant, God’s servants stood in God’s presence, heard what God had to say, and then told others what they had heard. But that is not sufficient in the new covenant. Now, God’s servants must *go through trials and afflictions* and experience God’s grace helping them to overcome in all those trials, and *then* exhort others to follow their own example. That is how new covenant ministry is far higher than old covenant ministry - and it is far costlier too.

We cannot become servants of the new covenant by going to a Bible-school. *No true apostle or prophet in the Bible ever came out of a Bible-school*. We cannot study the Bible like we study chemistry, cooped up in a classroom. The Holy Spirit teaches us the meaning of the Scriptures in the midst of life’s situations. That was how the apostles learnt it. And that is how God’s servants learn it today as well. Only thus can we lead others to partake of eternal life. *It is by following Jesus that we become servants of the new covenant*.

Under the old covenant it was not possible for people to press on to perfection. But in the new covenant we can (*See Heb.6:1 with 7:19*).

But we cannot lead others to perfection if we are not pressing on to perfection ourselves. Only if we are “*cleansing OURSELVES from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God*” (*2 Cor.7:1*), and “*purifying OURSELVES even as Jesus is pure*” (*1 Jn.3:3*) can we lead others also to such a life. There is no other way.

We have to be mini-forerunners for the others. That is why God takes us through varied and trying situations - more than all the other believers in our churches have to go through. For only thus can we be true shepherds to them. Otherwise we will be hirelings, seeking our own gain - either money or man's honour.

That does not mean that we have to face all the circumstances that others in our church face. That would be impossible. Jesus did not become our Forerunner by facing all our circumstances, but by being tempted with all the *temptations* that we face (*Heb.4:15*). Jesus did not have a drunken father or a nagging wife or disobedient children, as some of us may be having. Jesus did not have to wait in long queues outside government offices for a license as we have to wait today. Yet He was our Forerunner, because *He faced all the temptations that we face today*, in different circumstances in His day.

God has to take us through all the *temptations* that our brothers and sisters face. But in all those temptations, we must overcome, if we are to serve them, and lead them to partake of eternal life. That is how we become servants of the new covenant.

Peter writes to the elders "*to be examples to the flock*" (*1 Pet.5:3*). And Paul writes to Timothy (*in 1 Timothy 4:12*) that he should be "*an example to those who believe - in speech, love, faith and purity*".

First of all, we must be examples in our *speech*. Our speech must always be gentle and gracious. We must be totally free from gossiping. If someone shares something with us in confidence, we must be able to keep the matter secret - even from our wives.

We must be examples in *love*. Others must see that no matter what they say or do to us, our love to them never changes.

We must be examples in *faith*. In all the trying circumstances that we face, people must see that we never get into a panic, but always have the perfect confidence that God is able to see us through.

We must be examples in *purity*. We cannot expect purity in the relationships between young brothers and sisters in our churches, if we ourselves are not first class examples in this area.

A Bondslave Of Christ

Paul called himself a *bondslave of Jesus Christ* (*Rom.1:1*). That is what all the early apostles were. Jesus is looking today for bondslaves - not servants. There is a difference between a servant and a slave. A servant works for pay. A slave gets no salary. God has no servants under the new covenant, only *bondslaves*.

Jesus never offered any salary to those whom He called to be His apostles. If we are called to full-time Christian work, let us ensure that we *never* work for a salary, or else we will end up as servants of men. Let us not serve our churches, expecting people to give us gifts. If they choose to do so, without our expecting anything from them, that is all right. But we should never expect anything from anyone.

We must also make it a principle that we will never receive any money from those whose standard of living is *lower* than ours.

The highest way to serve the Lord in full-time work, however, is the way Paul served the Lord as an apostle - by having some secular employment, so that we are not dependent on anyone's gifts for our needs (*1 Cor.9:14-18; 2 Cor.11:7-15; Acts 20:33,34*).

We cannot be servants of the new covenant, if we are working for pay. We must be bondslaves. If we feel that we have a right to comforts and conveniences, then we are paid servants, not bondslaves. A bondslave has no right to anything - not even to honour or reputation.

If God gives us a house to live in, we are thankful. But we will serve Him, even if we don't have a house to live in. The fact that He gives us the privilege to build the Body of Christ is more than enough for us when we are true bondslaves.

Romans 6:22 speaks of the past present and future of a true bondslave of God.

(1) In the past - *freed from conscious sin*.

(2) In the present - *the fruit of progressive sanctification*.

(3) In the future - *eternal life (the fullness of the Divine nature)*.

First of all, we must be *freed from conscious sin*. Many don't mourn for their *secret* failures and that

is why they don't come to a life of victory over sin. We may imagine that impurity in our thought-life is not important, because others don't see that area of our lives. But it is there that God tests us to see whether we fear Him or not.

Secondly: Increasing *sanctification* will be the *primary* fruit that comes forth from our lives, if we are true bondslaves of God. Bringing others to Christ and building them up in the faith will be the *secondary* fruit. If we are really serving the Lord, our labour will certainly result in increasing godliness in our personal lives.

Sanctification is a process in which we get increasing light on the evil that dwells in our flesh, and in which, as we bear the *dying of Jesus* in our bodies, we partake more and more of *the life of Jesus* in area after area. If we are being sanctified, we will get light, for example, on the harshness of the tone of our voice when we speak to our family members, on our lack of love towards those we disagree with, on our seeking honour in our ministry, on our excessive talking and foolish jesting, and on the deadness of our preaching etc., etc.,

And finally, the bondsman looks forward to partaking of God's nature (*eternal life*) in all its fullness. That is the goal towards which every true bondsman of God presses on.

As slaves of God, we may have to go through many trials, misunderstandings and false accusations, on earth. But it will be worth it all when we see Jesus, if we endure in love, until the end.

Paul reminds us that as servants of the new covenant, we "*must give no cause for offense in anything, in order that the ministry be not discredited. But in everything, commending ourselves as bondslaves of God - in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, in labours, in sleeplessness, in hunger, in purity, in patience, in kindness, in genuine love, by glory and dishonour, by evil report and good report, regarded as deceivers and yet true, as unknown (to men) yet well-known (to God), as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things, with a heart that is opened wide to those whose hearts are narrow towards us*" (2 Cor.6:3-11).

Subduing Our Bodies

In *1 Corinthians 9:27*, Paul tells us one more secret of his life. He "*treated his body roughly, training it TO DO WHAT IT SHOULD, AND NOT WHAT IT WANTS TO*" (*Living*). Otherwise he feared that after he had preached to others, he would be disqualified.

It is amazing to see that Paul had a *fear* that he might be disqualified even after all that he had done for the Lord.

There are healthy fears and there are unhealthy fears: *To fear that GOD MIGHT HURT US is an unhealthy fear. But to fear that WE MIGHT HURT GOD (by something we say or do) is a healthy fear.*

In the same way, to fear that we might finally be disqualified, is a *healthy* fear that will keep us alert and "on our toes" at all times. It will enable us to subdue our bodies and make them our slaves.

God's Word tells us to "*work out our own salvation with fear and trembling*" (*Phil.2:12*). That exhortation is especially necessary for preachers, because *every preacher is in constant danger of becoming a hypocrite*. He is in danger of preaching things that he has not yet practised. He is in danger of giving others an impression about himself that is not totally true, and he is in danger of spending more time preparing and perfecting his sermons than in perfecting his life!!

Paul says in *1 Corinthians 9:26* that he had a very definite aim in what he was doing. He didn't fight or run aimlessly. He ran towards a definite goal. He fired at a definite target.

I remember the days when we cadets were being taught to shoot with rifles in the military academy. We had to lie down on the ground, a few feet apart from each other, with rifles in our hands. Each of us had a target-board some yards in front of us, marked with a number of concentric circles, with a point in the centre called the "*bull's eye*".

When we first began shooting, our aim was highly inaccurate. Some of us would be hitting the next person's target, and not our own!! After a while, we learnt to hit our own targets.

That's how it often is with many Christians too. They hit *other people's* targets and not their own. They are busybodies in other people's matters. But if they work out their own salvation, they will

gradually learn to hit their own target and finally hit the *bull's eye*. Then their aim would have become perfect. Paul's aim was perfect. He didn't judge others. He judged *himself* and subdued *his own* body. And so he fought a good fight and finished his course (2 Tim.4:7).

Our *eyes* and our *tongue* are the two members of our body that we need to discipline the most.

We invite unbelievers to give their *hearts* to Christ. But the Lord asks us to give Him our *bodies* (Rom.12:1) - and He asks especially for our *eyes* and our *tongues*. If we don't give Him these, *all* the time, we cannot expect to be bondslaves or spokesmen of Christ, or to stand approved by God in the final day.

If we don't keep our *eyes* under control - at home, in the bus, on the road and in our place of work - we will find that even if we preach like angels, we will be disqualified by God in the final day. Many servants of God through the centuries have fallen because they were not careful with *their eyes*. They allowed their eyes to wander and look at pretty girls, and soon one thing led to another, and they fell into sin. It is not enough to say that we don't lust after women. The Bible warns us *not even to admire* a woman's BEAUTY, lest it bring us to spiritual poverty (Prov.6:25,26). How careful we must be then.

We have to be careful in the same way with our *tongues*. God will *not* use the tongue of a man to preach His Word, if that man allows his tongue to be used by Satan at other times. The Lord told Jeremiah, "*If you separate the precious from the worthless (in your conversation), then You will become My spokesman*" (Jer.15:19).

We must never speak anything that does not come from a heart of goodness. That's not easy to do, because we are so weak in this area. We have to be ruthless if we are to discipline our tongues.

I am sure there must have been many young people in our land whom God had called in past days to His service, whom He had planned to make His prophets in India. But they did not become prophets, because they were not careful to discipline their *eyes* and their *tongues*. They did not subdue their bodies.

We are called members of the *Body of Christ*, because that expresses an *intimate, inward* relationship with Christ the Head, just like our bodily members have with our brains in our physical bodies.

Jesus was faithful to keep every part of His body available *exclusively* for His Father (His Head). It is written in *Romans 15:4* that *He never pleased Himself*. He never sought His own pleasure in the way he used His eyes or His tongue. He did not look at what He wanted to. Nor did He speak what he wanted to. He always sought to do what pleased His Father. Thus He presented His body without any blemish to His Father and became the perfect spokesman of His Father to the world (*Heb.9:14*). That is how we are to live too, as members of His spiritual Body now.

To be a wholehearted disciple of Jesus is to have a burning desire to present ourselves to God without any blemish.

If we want to build the church as the Body of Christ, we must gather together all those who are eager to present their bodies to God thus, and who are really keen to make their bodies their slaves.

Each time we miss the *bull's eye*, we must mourn for our failure. We must mourn when our eyes are not absolutely pure. We must mourn when our tongues have spoken something that was not spoken in absolute goodness.

In *Romans 7:23* Paul honestly admitted that he kept on seeing (*present* tense) a law in his bodily members (which was contrary to the law of Christ), that made him a prisoner to the law of sin. If Paul had referred to this in the *past* tense, as something he had once seen, it would have been a different matter. But he saw it and kept on seeing it day by day. In other words, he kept on getting light on the fact that nothing good dwelt in his flesh. And he kept on cleansing himself from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. Thus he kept his body subdued and remained faithful to God until the end of his life. That is why he was not disqualified, but finished his course with joy, unlike many preachers in our day.

Godliness - The True And The False

Under the old covenant, people were exhorted to meditate on "*the LAW of the Lord*" (*Psa.1:2*). But under the new covenant, we are exhorted to meditate on "*the GLORY of the Lord*" (*2 Cor. 3:18*).

If we look only at the letter of God's Word, we will become Pharisees, and we will build a church of Pharisees. But if we look at the glory of the life of Jesus, as we see it in the Word, we will be transformed increasingly into His likeness.

The secret of living a godly life (the Holy Spirit tells us in *1 Timothy 3:16*), lies in seeing the example of Jesus, Who lived on earth *with all the limitations of the flesh*, and Who had *no more resources than we can have - the power of the Holy Spirit*, and Who yet lived in perfect purity in His spirit. If He could live like that, so can we.

"The one who says he abides in Him, ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked." (*1 Jn.2:6*).

We cannot blame the flesh any more for our sinning. For there was One Who walked this earth in the flesh and Who did not sin. He overcame through the power of God's grace - and so can we.

The measure in which we ourselves follow Jesus in an overcoming life will determine the measure in which we can lead our fellow-believers also to walk as Jesus walked.

Immediately after speaking about the secret of godliness (in *1 Timothy 3:16*), the Holy Spirit warns us about deceiving spirits who will come in the last days seeking to turn believers away from *this* way of godliness to a *counterfeit* way of becoming holy.

"The Spirit explicitly says that in the latter times, some will fall away from this faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits" (*1 Tim.4:1*).

The primary mark of all *deceiving spirits* is that they *"do not acknowledge that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh"* (*2 Jn.7*). They will not acknowledge that Jesus overcame all sin in the flesh.

Through listening to such deceiving spirits, believers will finally be led to believe *"doctrines of demons"* (*1 Tim.4:2*). Two examples of doctrines of demons are mentioned there : *forbidding marriage and forbidding the eating of certain foods*.

Celibacy and fasting have always been regarded among heathen religions as ways to become holy. But these demonic doctrines will find their way even into Christianity in the last days. We see that being fulfilled in our day. There are Christian groups today that teach that we can become more holy if we remain unmarried or if we fast regularly. Are these doctrines of demons? Yes. Because they turn our attention away from the secret of godliness to asceticism. Instead of following Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit, we then begin to seek after godliness through monastic self-discipline.

There is nothing wrong with remaining unmarried or with fasting. But when these are promoted as the secret of godliness, then the error is serious. In fact any doctrine that leads people away from *"Christ manifest in the flesh as the secret of godliness"* - is a doctrine of a demon. True holiness is attained, not by yoga or meditation or self-discipline, but by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In *Colossians 2:20-23*, Paul says that ascetic practices may have some external value, but they will not lead us to the Divine nature being manifest in our flesh. Only the Holy Spirit can produce that.

In the church, we must set people free from religious asceticism. Otherwise we will be proclaiming only a Christianized version of yoga.

The Devil is forever seeking to lead believers either to the one extreme of *materialism*, or to the opposite extreme of *asceticism*.

Materialism is not so dangerous, because it is obviously worldly even to a carnal believer. But asceticism is more dangerous, because it appears to be leading to godliness. Both these are cliffs that stand opposite to each other. But both lead to the bottom. Irreligious lovers of money and religious, self-disciplined Pharisees are both headed for hell. And as servants of God we must not forget that.

The Big And The Great In The World's Eyes

In building the church, we must remember that *"everything that is big in the eyes of men is an abomination in God's sight"* (*Lk.16:15*).

We must never therefore bring human greatness into the church. When we preach God's Word, we must not seek to *impress* people with our cleverness or our knowledge or our polished language. That would be demonstrating our *soul-power* in the church.

Our values in the church are the exact opposite of the values that worldly people have. Worldly people place a lot of value on money, whereas we place no value on it. Worldly people honour those who are great and influential in the world, but we don't care for them at all. On the other hand, we value those who are humble and God-fearing. The world places a great value on being intelligent, whereas we care nothing for a man's cleverness. The world and the church are not just *slightly* different. They are facing in *opposite* directions.

To show off our cleverness or our greatness in the church is an abomination to God. It is the equivalent of offering a pig to God on the altar in the Old Testament. We must live in a healthy fear of bringing our human abominations into the service of God.

Being Like A Little Child

In *Isaiah 11:6*, we are told that during the 1000-year reign of Jesus on earth, when He returns, everything will be peaceful. There will be no wild animals, and life on earth will be simply wonderful.

But we have a foretaste of that life in the church already - because the kingdom of God has already come in the church. "*Wolves*" are already lying down with "*lambs*", "*leopards*" and "*goats*" are at peace, and "*cattle*" are safe amidst the "*lions*" - in the fellowship of the church. In the world, people with such diverse personalities as these, cannot get along with each other. But in the church, they die to their Self-life, and live in glorious peace with each other.

And in this kingdom, Isaiah says that "*a little child will be the leader*" (*Isa.11:6*). Thus we see who is really fit to lead a church - *the one who is most like a little child*.

The real leader in a church is the one who is guileless and humble like a little child. It is easy to fellowship with such a brother. People develop confidence in such a brother - who is himself, who is not trying to impress others with his personality or his gifts, and who is not trying to imitate some other more mature brother.

In many Christian groups, leadership is given to those who are smart, talented and humorous, and who are good musicians and organizers. But in the new-covenant church, God appoints those who are like little children - for they are the greatest ones in His kingdom.

If the "*wolves*" in a church are tearing up the "*lambs*", then the kingdom of God has not yet come to that church. And that must be because the leader is *not like a child!!* So it is the leaders who should judge themselves when things go wrong in a church.

Jesus told His disciples in *Matthew 18:4* to humble themselves like little children, for a child is the greatest in the kingdom of God.

Now we know that the greatest person in God's kingdom is Jesus Himself. So that must mean that Jesus humbled himself at all times like a little child.

There we have an example for all Christian leaders to follow.

We read on one occasion that Jesus healed multitudes of sick people, but told the people not to tell anyone about it. He didn't want any publicity for Himself. That was in order to fulfil a Scripture that said that He "*would not make his voice heard in the streets*" (He would not advertise Himself) (*Matt.12:15-20*).

That Scripture begins with these words "*Behold my Child...*" (*Matt.12:18 - margin*). God is saying there, "*Look carefully at My Child - the One who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven - He heals the sick and then disappears as though He has done nothing.*"

In the church, the one with this spirit is the real leader.

A little child realises that he is a nobody, and that he knows almost nothing. And it is the realization that we are nobodies and that we know almost nothing of spiritual matters, that will keep us as little children always. It is only such a person whom God can attest as His representative in the church.

Jesus gave us only *two* examples to learn *humility* from: *Himself and little children*. In the gospels, we can see how Jesus lived, and learn humility from His example. Around us, we can see little babies, and learn humility from them.

What are the thoughts that go through a little baby's mind when it is lying in its cradle? Does he think

how smart he is or how much others appreciate him etc., No. He has no such thoughts at all. He has no self consciousness whatsoever. He is just himself - natural, with no pretense or artificiality. That is our example.

Are we bothered with thoughts about what others think about us or our ministry? Then we are not like little children. We must battle these high thoughts until we are converted and become like little children. Only then will we be fully qualified to lead God's people.

Then we will be happy with any small corner on this earth that God places us in, to do His work. And we won't have any ambition to become great in the eyes of men. We will be happy to fulfil the task that God has entrusted us with in Christ's Body. And we won't be jealous of anyone else's ministry either.

Praise God that we can experience as well as proclaim such a wonderful gospel - that we can unlearn all our corrupt "*grown-up ways*" and become like little children once again.

Thus we shall become true servants of the new covenant.

CHAPTER FIVE

DEPENDENCE UPON THE HOLY SPIRIT

"Cursed is the man who puts his trust in mortal man, and makes flesh his strength. He will be like a stunted shrub in the desert. But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord and has made the Lord his hope and confidence. He will be like a tree planted along a riverbank that will go right on producing luscious fruit. (Jer.17:5-8 - Living)

A servant of the new-covenant must live and serve God in total and utter dependence on Him for grace and power for every task. That is why prayer should be a vital part of his life - for prayer is the expression of our helpless, but confident dependence on his God.

A self-confident man will not pray except as a ritual. Christian leaders who do not pray are not dependent on God, because they are self-sufficient. And invariably they will be like barren trees, and their assemblies will be like deserts. The river spoken of in the above verse is the Holy Spirit. One who depends on the Lord alone for help will earnestly seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit constantly.

The prophet Zechariah was once given a vision of a golden lampstand - a symbol of the church (Zech.4:2; see Rev.1:20).

To keep the lamp burning continuously, the greatest need is a continuous supply of oil (v.3). And for this, there were two olive trees planted on either side of the lampstand - symbolising the FRUIT and the GIFTS of the Holy Spirit, through which the church is built.

The angel then told Zechariah that God's work would be done, not by human power, but by the power of the Holy Spirit, and that every mountain that stood in the way would be flattened (Zech.4:6,7).

Every Mountain Will Be Flattened

In God's work, we will face hindrances and obstacles of many types. We may wonder why God allows us to face such mountains, when we are wholeheartedly seeking to do His will alone. But God's purpose is to exercise our faith, so that we can experience His mighty power reducing all those mountains to a plain.

We read of an occasion in the gospels, where Jesus urged His disciples to go across the lake of Galilee. They did not want to go, but he urged them to go (Mt.14:22). When they obeyed Him, they ran into a fierce storm. If they had disobeyed Him, and not crossed the lake, they would not have faced that storm at all. But they would not have experienced the power of the Lord stilling the storm either. It is only when we face the storms that we can also know the power of God.

It is the disobedient and compromising Christian who has an easy way through life. But he never experiences the power of God either. The disciple of Jesus may go through "many afflictions". But he

also experiences the Lord “delivering him out of all of them” (Psa.34:19).

God delights to see His people trust Him in the midst of gigantic problems that no man can solve. It is in such situations that we prove that we believe in an almighty God. Far too many of God’s people believe in a god of their own imagination who is unable to help them when they face man-made or demon-made storms or mountains. That is not the God of the Bible, but a god of their own making - an impotent idol of their imagination, no better than any heathen idol.

Is there any problem too big for our God? No. Then why do we fear when men or demons raise up mountains in our way?

When the Israelites heard of the size of the giants of Canaan, they began to think, “These giants are too big for OUR god to handle”. Who was their god? Not the God Who had delivered them from Egypt, but a powerless figment of their own imagination. No wonder God sentenced them to 38 years of wandering in the wilderness (Deut.2:14).

They were unbelieving - and their unbelief insulted God and tied His hands, so that He could do nothing for them. There are Christian leaders today also who tie God’s hands through their unbelief.

But God is looking for men like Joshua and Caleb, who will believe and proclaim that there is nothing impossible for God.

God is always on our side against Satan. And nothing can prevent Him from working for us, except our unbelief. Even if all the 5500 million people in the world and all the millions of Satan’s demons opposed us, they would not be able to hinder God’s purposes for us - if we trust in God. So we never get discouraged or give up - no matter what happens. Even if we die, we will die trusting in our Almighty God, believing that His Name will be glorified through our death!

When God allows us to face mountains - whether in the form of demons that wrestle with us, or hundreds of people who oppose us and accuse us - His purpose is that we might thereby become strong and wealthy. “If God be for us who can be against us” (Rom.8:31).

It is only when we face mountains and the opposition of demons and men, that Zechariah 4:6,7 becomes more than just a wall-text hanging in our sitting-room. It gets written into our bloodstream!

But we have to be wholehearted and say, “Lord I really want to stand for You here, whatever the cost. Give me grace to stand for You, even if all my fellow-believers become lukewarm, and even if my wife opposes me. I am totally Yours. All I have is Yours. I am willing to spend all my life’s earnings also for Your work” Then we will find God continually flattening mountains in front of us, everywhere we go.

Let there be any number of giants in the land. Our God can handle all of them. He will “be an enemy to our enemies”, and “fight against those who fight with us” (Exod.23:22; Isa.49:25). God has promised that “no weapon formed against us will prosper”, and that “He Himself will vindicate us” (Isa.54:17). So we never need to defend ourselves when falsely accused. We can remain silent, “entrusting our cause to Him Who judges righteously” (1 Pet.2:23). That is the dignity with which servants of the new covenant conduct themselves.

We depend on God utterly, knowing that He will never let us down. What He did for Jesus, Our Forerunner, He will do for us too.

Our own testimony, as we have laboured to build the Body of Christ in India, is that we have encountered many mountains during these past years - the opposition of men and demons, false accusations, malicious gossip, betrayal by “false brethren” (2 Cor.11:26), etc., We have never defended ourselves. We have always fallen down before God and said, “Lord, this is Your work, not ours. We are only Your servants. We believe that no man or demon can hinder what You are seeking to accomplish in our land. We command this mountain to be removed out of our way, in Jesus’ Name.”

Today, after 20 years, we can testify that God has removed EVERY SINGLE mountain that has stood in our way. He has been an enemy to our enemies and He has vindicated and attested us Himself. All glory be to His Name. We know He will do the same in the future too.

Casting Believers On The Lord

As servants of God, we must also lead believers to be dependent on the Holy Spirit and not on us.

When they are babes, they may need our help in many matters. But once they have known the Lord for even a few months, we must cast them on the Lord alone for help.

God has ordained that children should be able to stand on their own legs just one year after they are born. It must be the same in our churches. Within one year after they are born again, believers should be learning to walk with the Lord, overcoming sin. By the time they are two years old, they should be steady on their feet.

God brought the Israelites also to Kadesh-Barnea just two years after they left Egypt, and told them to enter the promised land. But they disobeyed the Lord. Their failure is repeatedly held out in the New Testament as a warning for us (See 1 Cor.10 and Heb.2).

We should not allow believers to be dependent on us for finding God's will for them. We must cast them on the Lord. Only thus will they grow. Under the new covenant, the promise of God is that, "they shall not teach everyone his brother saying, 'Know the Lord', for all shall know Me from the least to the greatest." (Heb.8:11).

Jesus said that His sheep would hear His voice. They should not have to hear it always through us. Here is where most Christian leaders have failed God. They have led believers into an Old Testament type of life, where they are dependent on their leader to tell them what to do when they have to take a decision.

A new covenant servant of God leads believers to have a direct connection with Christ their Head. That is the only way we can build the church as Christ's Body.

Concern For Building Christ's Body

In Zechariah 4:9, we read that Zerubbabel (a type of the Lord Jesus) who laid the foundation for the temple, will also finish it. The Lord will not leave His work unfinished.

When the Lord lays hold of two disciples to build a pure testimony for His Name in a town, then He has already laid the foundation for His work there, in them. They must then ensure that there are no cracks in the foundation - no gaps between the two of them.

If they are faithful to build and preserve their fellowship with each other, the Lord will complete His work. He will build His church there.

If your heart is set on the Body of Christ being built in your town, you can be certain that God's heart is set on it much more. Your concern for building the church is only a drop in the ocean compared to His. It is He Who put that burden like a seed into your heart. It is conceit to imagine that such a burden is your own. You can only water the seed that God Himself has planted. He will cause it to grow.

If you don't consider the building of the church as God's work first of all, you will wonder when you get into a tight spot, whether God will help you or not. You will then ask the Lord, like His disciples, "Do You not care that we are perishing?" (Mk.4:38).

It is pride - the pride that makes us think that WE are the ones who are building the Body of Christ - that makes us unbelieving. There is a close connection between pride and unbelief.

In Habakkuk 2:4, we read that the opposite of the man of faith, is not the man of unbelief, but the man of pride!! And in John 5:44, Jesus said that it was pride (seeking man's honour) that prevented people from having faith. So we see that unbelief comes from pride. Proud people don't need to depend on God. So they don't have faith.

In exactly the same way there is a close connection between humility and faith. A humble man is one who has no dependence on himself. He depends on God alone.

No Confidence In Ourselves

Under the old covenant, the primary mark of an Israelite was circumcision. Anyone who was not circumcised was to be cut off from God's people, for he had broken the Divine covenant (Gen.17:14).

In the new covenant, the spiritual meaning of circumcision is explained as "having no confidence in ourselves" (Phil.3:3).

It is the one who has no confidence in himself whom God upholds and whom God anoints continuously with His Spirit. There is a prophecy concerning Jesus that states, "Behold My Servant Whom I uphold....I have put My Spirit upon Him" (Isa.42:1; see Matt.12:18)

The anointing of the Holy Spirit is the prime essential for being a new covenant servant of God. And we see in this verse that God gives that anointing to those who are upheld by Him - that is, to those who are helplessly dependent on Him.

Faith in God cannot be exercised until we have become weak in ourselves. Otherwise our faith will be in the arm of flesh - which could be either our own cleverness, ability and money, or the resources of other people whom we know and whom we can depend on.

Let me illustrate: If a rich brother and a poor brother are both faced with a sudden financial need, who would have to trust in God more? Obviously the poor brother. The rich man has enough money. So he does not need to pray. But the poor brother, if he has faith, will cry out to God, and He will not be disappointed. It is when we don't have human resources to fall back on that we learn to live by faith.

Even many so-called "full-time workers", who claim to be "living by faith", have fairly reliable human resources that they can depend on. They have brothers who can be depended on to send them money every month - just in case God lets them down!!

"Faith comes by hearing" (Rom.10:17). It is when we hear what God says that faith is born in our hearts. God speaks to us through the Scriptures and also through His Spirit. So, if we don't listen to God, we won't have faith. Our spiritual antennas must be attuned to listen to God the whole day, no matter what we are doing.

To listen to God ALWAYS is one of the most important requirements for a servant of God. Jesus lived every day listening to, and obeying the promptings of the Holy Spirit (See Isa.50:4). That proved that He had no confidence in Himself and knew that only the Father could show Him what things had eternal value and what things didn't. We waste a lot of time doing things that have no eternal value, because we are in too much of a hurry to have time to listen to God.

God wants to teach us how to live by faith in Him. Four times the Bible says that "the righteous shall live by faith". That does not refer to full-time workers, but to all believers. And so God arranges our circumstances such that we are compelled to turn to Him again and again for guidance. And if we are seeking for God's best, He will gradually take away the human props that we have depended on for so long, and bring us to the place where we trust Him alone for all our needs - whether those needs be financial or physical or whatever.

In 2 Chronicles 16:12, we read that King Asa of Judah was sick. When a king is sick, he can afford to get the best physicians to treat him. Yet Asa died. Why? Because "even when his disease was severe, he did not seek the Lord, but depended on the doctors" (v.12).

Now if a poor man in Israel had been sick, he would have had to seek the Lord, and the Lord could have healed him. It is when we are weak and our human resources are limited that we seek the Lord.

Faith is such an important factor in the Christian life that we are told that "without faith, it is impossible to please God" (Heb.11:6). That means even if we live in purity and goodness, and never backbite or gossip or cheat or tell lies, and even if we give all our money for God's work, if we don't live by faith (in helpless dependence on God and with no confidence in ourselves), we still won't please Him.

As servants of the new covenant, it is faith that we are impart to others in the church - not just Bible-knowledge. We have to teach them from our own experience how to trust the Lord in all situations.

Soul-Power, Electronic-Power And Money-Power

Another thing that we must understand, as God's servants, is the difference between our soul-power and the Holy Spirit's power.

Peter once told the Lord, "You are the Christ the Son of the living God." Jesus immediately replied saying, "Flesh and blood did not reveal that to you". In other words, Peter did not discover that spiritual truth by his soul-power - his human cleverness or shrewdness.

Our soul (mind) cannot give us Divine revelation. If we are intelligent, we can get clever thoughts from the Bible. And we can share those thoughts with others in the church and impress the undiscerning. But clever human thoughts and Divine revelation are as different and as far apart from each other, as earth and heaven.

Paul preached with fear and trembling, because he was afraid of using his own cleverness in preaching God's Word - lest the faith of others rest on his wisdom rather than on God's power (1 Cor.2:1-5).

Humanly speaking, Paul was ideally suited to work among the Jews (since he knew their Scriptures), and Peter among the Gentiles. Yet God gave them exactly the opposite ministries (Gal.2:8), so that they would depend on the Holy Spirit and not on their own abilities.

Clever thoughts are usually what we think of to preach to others to get their honour. Revelation, on the other hand, makes us fall on our faces before God. With our cleverness, we can impress people. But with Divine revelation we can help them.

When Isaiah got a revelation of God's glory, he didn't think of his vision as a point for his next sermon!! He fell down and worshipped God. The same thing happened to John on Patmos. It is only after both of them fell down before the Lord, that He told them to take His message to others. We must worship God before we can serve Him.

Soul-power is also seen in the ministry of those preachers, who, through hypnotic power, make people fall down, laugh hysterically and give their money to the preachers. People with psychosomatic illnesses (illnesses caused by wrong mental attitudes) are also "healed" at such meetings. All this is done by human soul-power, but using the Name of Jesus - and so even many believers are deceived. As servants of God we must be bold to expose these counterfeits.

Soul-power can also be seen in the way many Christian leaders dominate their followers and overwhelm them by their personalities. People stand in awe of such leaders and respect them as "holy men of God". And these leaders love such admiration from their followers.

Music also has tremendous soul-power. It can stir our emotions. But we must not be deceived into thinking that that is the Holy Spirit's power. We can draw many people to our churches with good music. But whom will we draw? Not the poor in spirit who are seeking for help to live a godly life, but the cultured and the sophisticated ones who are proud of their understanding and their musical tastes.

I remember, one Sunday, when a musically-gifted couple came to our meeting in Bangalore. They found the music to be below par, and so never came again. We were thankful for being preserved from people who were looking for a musical church and not a godly one!!

What we need in the church is not a good orchestra but the power of the Holy Spirit. Peter did not draw the crowds on the day of Pentecost with a keyboard and a drum-set, but with the anointing of God. It is when this anointing is gone, that believers seek to replace it with fine music, humorous sermons and grand buildings etc.,

Electronic gadgets can also be a snare. Bible-teaching tapes by anointed servants of God can certainly help us in our spiritual growth. But we have to be careful that we don't begin to depend on such tapes more than on the Holy Spirit, when we want to hear God speak to us. Even if we had tapes of the apostle Paul with us, we would not be able to build the Body of Christ with them!

Money is another thing that has tremendous power in the world. And we can easily lean on it. Almost every Christian organization today speaks of the need for money, and sends out newsletters and magazines to rake in the "almighty dollar" from simple and sincere (but gullible) believers in Western countries.

The apostles on the other hand, never once asked believers for money for themselves, or for their work. They urged believers only "to remember the poor" (Gal.2:10) and to help those who were in need (2 Cor.8 & 9). But alas, what the apostles never spoke of even once, is spoken of all the time nowadays, in Christian work.

God says, "If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is Mine and all that it contains" (Psa.50:12).

What about us as servants of this God? When we are in need - of food or of money - what do we do? Do we tell our heavenly Father or do we tell men? If we are truly called of God, we will never have any lack of earthly necessities. God has no lack of money. What He lacks is broken, humble, faithful and

trusting servants.

God is looking for broken, humble people whom He can empower with His Holy Spirit and use to build the church.

God is a jealous God. He will not give His glory to another. He will not build the church with any power other than His power.

God's work is done even today, as in days of old - not by soul-power or by electronic power or by financial might, but by the power of the Holy Spirit!

The Life And Ministry Of Jesus

Whenever we think of the Spirit-filled life, we must look at the life and ministry of Jesus, for He is the clearest Example of a Spirit-filled man.

Which did Jesus have - the fruit or the gifts of the Spirit? The answer is "Both". Let us also seek for both then.

The Holy Spirit will show us the glory of Jesus in the mirror of God's Word, and then transform us into His likeness (2 Cor 3:18).

The Spirit will show us the life of Jesus first. For example, He will show us His perfect patience - how He never got irritated when people slapped Him and pulled out the hairs from His beard and accused Him falsely. The Spirit will show us how Jesus reacted to the different situations that he faced in His home and in His carpenter-shop. And if we submit to the Spirit, He will work that nature into us too.

God desires to work in us to will and do His good pleasure. But we must work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil.2:12,13). And then we will see a transformation taking place in our lives gradually.

To partake of God's nature is one thing. To try and manufacture it is quite another. We cannot manufacture God's nature. When we want to partake of God's nature, we have to come in brokenness, recognising our inability to produce it, and humbly receive it from the Holy Spirit. But alas, it takes a long time for many to realise that they cannot produce the Divine nature themselves.

If we feel that we have become patient today, because we were wholehearted and because we disciplined ourselves, then we are being deceived by Satan. That is how he will seek to puff us up in order to destroy us. If the patience we have is our own product, then it is a worthless human virtue - as worthless as human dung.

If on the other hand, we recognise that we received our patience from God, and that we did not produce it ourselves, it won't be difficult for us to give God all the glory for what He has done in our lives.

So let us allow the Holy Spirit to show us the glory of Jesus and to transform us into the likeness of Christ in every area of our lives.

The Holy Spirit will also show us how Jesus served the Father. Jesus was anointed with the Spirit and equipped with supernatural gifts. He did not dare to serve the Father without being anointed first - as multitudes of believers are seeking to do, today.

It is written about Jesus that "God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power". What was the result? "He went about DOING GOOD and HEALING (DELIVERING) ALL WHO WERE OPPRESSED BY THE DEVIL, for God was with Him." (Acts 10:38).

The world around us is full of people who are suffering because Satan has oppressed and harassed and bound them in some way or the other. When God is with us, we will do what Jesus did - go around doing good to them and delivering them from Satan's bondage. It is impossible to do that without being anointed with the Holy Spirit.

If Jesus Himself could not fulfil such a ministry without the anointing of the Spirit, how can we?

When we see the baptism and the gifts of the Spirit in the context of Jesus' ministry, we can never go wrong. Jesus not only lived a holy life, He also had a ministry to others. He preached, healed the sick, cast out demons, and made disciples.

We can never serve God effectively as His servants in the church if we are not anointed as Jesus was.

There are many who study the Word carefully and preach it accurately, but they don't have the anointing of the Holy Spirit upon them. Therefore their ministry is dry and dead.

As servants of the new covenant, our preaching must always be in the power of the Spirit. Jesus was never dull or boring or stale at any time when He preached - because He was anointed. When we are anointed as He was, we too will never be dull or boring or stale. Instead, our ministry will be a refreshing blessing to everyone.

When Jesus preached the Word to the disciples who were walking to Emmaus, they testified that their hearts "burned within them" (Lk.24:32). That is how a truly anointed ministry is - it makes people's hearts burn. And that is how our ministry should be always.

There must never be a time when we're not under the anointing of the Spirit. Then we will always have a word to give to those in need whom we come across, even as Jesus had (See Isa.50:4)

In Acts 1:1, it says that the gospel of Luke describes "all that Jesus BEGAN to do and to teach." So the Acts of the Apostles is a record of what Jesus CONTINUED to do and teach. In the gospels, we have the record of what Jesus did with His physical body. In the Acts we have the record of what He did with His spiritual Body. So the Acts of the Apostles is actually the acts of Jesus through the apostles.

Jesus is not engaged in some other ministry on earth today, than what He did when he came to earth 2000 years ago. He is still "going around doing good and delivering all who are oppressed by the devil" - through the members of His spiritual Body, the church.

And so it is an awesome responsibility that we have to be a servant of the Lord in His Body. Let us never take it lightly. If Jesus Who lived such a perfect life for 30 years needed to be anointed with the Holy Spirit before He began to serve the Father, how dare we engage in such a ministry without a similar anointing?

If we have not been anointed by the Spirit as yet, it must be because we have not sought for it sufficiently. And if we have not sought for it, it is probably because we have not valued it sufficiently. And if we have not valued it, it must be because we have been self-sufficient. Let us repent then of our self-sufficiency - and allow God to circumcise our hearts of all self-confidence.

The Anointing Of The Holy Spirit

Brothers, let us seek God with all our hearts for the anointing of the Holy Spirit. We can never serve God or build the church without it. This is our greatest and our most desperate need. Let us never be satisfied with anything less than that baptism of fire that Jesus gave His apostles on the day of Pentecost. And let us mourn whenever this fire of God departs from our ministry.

The anointing of the Spirit is always given in relation to the needs of others. Jesus said in Luke 4:18, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to THE POOR. He has sent Me to proclaim release to THE CAPTIVES, and recovery of sight to THE BLIND, to set free THOSE WHO ARE DOWNTRODDEN."

Notice here that the anointing of the Spirit is described as only meeting the needs of others - the poor, the captives, the blind and the downtrodden. It is not for meeting our own need. It is only when we have a burden and a concern for the poor and the downtrodden and the captives of Satan in our churches that God will anoint us.

Jesus once told a parable teaching us how we were to ask for the Holy Spirit's power (Lk.11:5-13). A man had a visitor one night and found that he had no food in the house to give him. So he went to his neighbour's house and kept on knocking until his neighbour got up from bed and gave him the food he wanted for his visitor. Jesus then went on to say that that was how we were to ask our heavenly Father for the power of the Holy Spirit (v.13).

If we don't have a concern for the needy people who come to our house (the church), we will not seek God for help to bless them and to set them free from their bondages.

When we see a brother being oppressed by Satan, what do we do? Do we just pray with him and send him away. Then we are unfit to represent the Lord Who came to set people free from Satan's oppression. We should seek God for that which our brother needs. We should tell the Lord that we don't have what it

takes to help him, and ask Him for power to set him free. And we must persist in asking until we receive. Then we will receive. That is the application of the above parable.

None of us can have all the gifts of the Spirit, as Jesus had - for the Spirit distributes the gifts among all the members of the Body as He wills. Jesus Himself was the Body of Christ initially. So naturally He had all the gifts of the Spirit. But today the Body of Christ consists of many members to whom the gifts are given. The Spirit may not have given you the gift of teaching or of healing. That does not matter. He may have given you the gift of encouraging others. If so, exercise that gift faithfully, and allow others to exercise THEIR gifts.

Don't attempt to be everything yourself - for you cannot.

There was only One Person Who could be everything Himself - and that was Jesus. Today we can be only one part of His Body. Therefore we can rejoice when we find that God has given younger brothers certain gifts that we ourselves don't have. So they can do that part of the work of the Body better than we can. Praise the Lord!

Once we SEE the Body of Christ, we will never again be jealous of anyone. Instead, we will rejoice in the ministry God has given them.

God gives us grace to help people in one area, and God gives others grace to help them in other areas. So there will be sincere thankfulness to God in our hearts for every single brother and sister.

The weakest brothers and sisters in the church also have an essential ministry. In fact the weaker they are, the more likely they are to be dependent on the Holy Spirit.

We are effective servants of God only when we can bring forth the ministries of ALL the brothers and sisters in our local church. A Christian leader who does everything himself is a failure as a servant of God. This is unfortunately the condition of many pastors today.

The Right Balance

We have to be careful that our life is not a reaction to the extremes that we have seen in other groups in Christendom.

In the history of Christendom, there have been many groups that majored on holiness and despised the gifts of the Spirit - even to the extent of calling them demonic!! They have all failed to fulfil God's highest purposes, as Jesus did.

At the opposite extreme, are groups that have majored on spiritual gifts alone, to such an extent that they have ignored personal holiness. Such groups have invariably gone astray, being deceived by religious spirits.

In the same way, there are some groups that major on an intellectual study of the Word. And at the opposite extreme are groups that major on emotional exuberance. But both groups seem to be ignorant of their soulishness. Intellectualism and emotionalism are both soulish. Neither of them constitutes true spirituality. The Holy Spirit leads God's children to a life of obedience to God's Word.

Whom shall we follow among all these groups? None of them.

We shall follow the perfect Example of our Lord, Who had both the fruit and the gifts of the Spirit, and Who obeyed the Word, instead of just studying it and getting excited over it! Then we won't go wrong.

Let us "pursue love and earnestly desire spiritual gifts", with all our hearts (1 Cor.14:1), and we shall then love everyone we meet, and deliver every Satan-oppressed soul who comes across our path.

Becoming A Blessing

The gifts of the Spirit are compared in 1 Cor.12 to the organs of the human body - the eye, the ear, the hands and the feet. We need eyes to see, ears to hear, hands to help others and feet to take us to different parts of this world. Even so, God has given us these gifts of the Spirit, so that a needy world around us can be blessed through them. He wants to give us power to free people from Satan's grip over their lives and from their frustrations and their fears.

When God anoints our heads with His oil, our cups WILL overflow with blessing to others. And if we keep pouring our oil into the vessels of others, we will find like the widow found (in Elisha's time - 2

Kings 4:1-7) that there is enough power and blessing in the anointing of God to help every single person who comes across our path. There wasn't a single vessel that remained unfilled with oil that day in that poor widow's house. Her whole neighbourhood was blessed through her. And our neighbourhood can be blessed in the same way too.

But we have to keep pouring out into the lives of others. That is a Divine law. If we selfishly keep God's blessing for ourselves alone, it will begin to stink like the manna did, even if our blessing came from heaven (like the manna did) in the first place.

Proverbs 11:25 says that it is only the one who waters others who will himself also be watered by God.

Jesus became a curse for us on Calvary's cross so that we might receive the blessing of Abraham - the promise of the Spirit (Gal.3:13). The blessing of Abraham is described in Genesis 12:3 as "being a blessing to all the families of the earth". This is what it means to be a servant of the new covenant : To be a blessing to EVERY family that we meet on the face of the earth. That is our birthright in Christ.

So, let us not "despise the day of small beginnings" (Zech.4:10). Maybe the Spirit will urge us to start by writing a letter of encouragement to just one person whom God lays on our hearts.

God may test our eagerness to serve Him by sending just one needy brother across our path - one hungry visitor. What will we do? Will we seek God for power to help that brother?

If we are unfaithful in such matters, we will miss everything that God has planned for us. To live under the anointing constantly, we must be faithful in the smallest of matters. It is through small actions that all mighty ministries begin. That is how the rivers of living water (that Jesus spoke of) began to flow from the sanctuary. It began as a trickle, but later on became a mighty river (See Ezek.47:1,9).

May God help us all to be faithful in the little things.

CHAPTER SIX

BEING A FATHER TO OTHERS

Paul said that even if there were countless teachers, there were not many fathers, in his time (1 Cor.4:15). This is true even today.

Every servant of God must strive to have the spirit of a father towards the brothers and sisters in the church.

It is easy to BECOME a father, but it is difficult to BE a father. A man can produce ten children without any difficulty. But to bring up those children to mature manhood is quite another matter.

It is the same in the church. To bring people to the new birth is relatively easy. But to present them perfect in Christ to the Father is far more difficult.

Our ambition should not be to have a large church but a pure one. It is no use having many people in our church, if they are not growing up to maturity and perfection.

What is the use boasting that we have many children if they are all retarded? If all our grown-up sons and daughters are still not toilet-trained but are still soiling their clothes, and haven't learnt to walk, and are still drinking milk from feeding bottles, that is not something to be proud of.

But many churches are full of such overgrown babies. They have been believers for over 20 years. But they still have dirty thoughts, they still cannot walk in victory, and they are still drinking milk (they only know about the forgiveness of sins). The reason for such retardation is that their leaders are teachers and not fathers.

Fathers And Teachers

Paul told the Corinthians, as a spiritual father, "I do not write these things to shame you" (1 Cor.4:14). Teachers seek to humiliate their failing students and put them to shame publicly. But fathers are different.

They cover every sin that their stumbling children commit, and continuously encourage them to a higher life.

It is far easier to be a teacher in an assembly than a father, for it costs a great deal of self-denial to carry the burdens of others on our hearts. Teachers can never build a family. They can only build classes. And many churches are schools, and not homes. Only a father can build a home and a family.

If our church is not like a family, what is the reason? It must be that we are teachers and not fathers. Do we look at the brothers and sisters in the church as students who need to be taught? Then we have the wrong spirit. If we are fathers, we will look at them as those who have to be borne with, and supported in a loving, caring and understanding way. It is good for us to judge ourselves and see what we really are - fathers or teachers.

It is no use blaming the brothers and sisters in the church saying that they are all carnal. Let us judge ourselves first.

A true spiritual father will not seek his own gain in anything, but always the welfare and the good of his spiritual children. Paul says in 2 Cor 12:14,15, "I will not be a burden to you. I do not seek what is yours but you. Children are not responsible to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls". Those are the words of a true father.

It cost Paul everything to be a father. He considered all that he had gained in life as rubbish compared to gaining Christ. He also considered it worth sacrificing everything in order to be a father to those whom he had brought to Christ.

A teacher works for pay. He does not seek the good of the students primarily, but his own gain. The gain we expect may not be money, but honour. Do we want to be respected and recognised as servants of God by others? Then we are seeking a salary - of honour - from them. Then we are teachers, not fathers.

Fathers expect nothing in return for all that they do for their children. Paul did not expect respect or even submission from others. He only sought their spiritual growth. What about us? Do we seek the good of the brothers and sisters in everything that we do?

The 'pastor-system' that we find in Christendom today was unheard of in the days of the apostles. It is this unScriptural system that has given rise to numerous teachers in Christendom - teachers who have to be paid a salary each month for the classes they take, and who make their students dependent on them for every major decision in life - whether it be marriage or employment or whatever.

The brothers and sisters in such churches never grow up. They remain spiritual babes forever, because this human system robs them of a direct connection with Christ their Head - which is their birthright under the new covenant.

How does a father care for his children? In a poor home, the father and mother will not even eat, if there is not enough food for the children. They will gladly deny themselves, and they will not even let their children know that they have not eaten, lest the children feel bad about it. A father hides his self denial from his children. Do we have such a spirit - that denies itself for the good of the brothers and sisters, and will not even let them know about it.

Another characteristic of a father is that he is eager to see his children advance beyond him in life - in education and in every other way. There are many fathers who have never studied beyond high school, who sacrifice so much to give a college-education to their children. They are happy to deny themselves the comforts of life for this purpose and they are delighted when their children graduate. No father is ever jealous to see his son advance beyond his status or his educational level in life.

That is how a true servant of God will be too. He will be delighted when younger brothers are wholehearted and get revelation from the Scriptures and are used by the Lord to be a blessing to others. He will sincerely long that they should advance beyond him spiritually, and be more useful in the Lord's hands than he has ever been.

When we see younger brothers growing up in the church, without any folly being manifested in their lives, because of good leadership that protects them, we should rejoice that they can have such a blessing as we never had when we were young. There will not be even a shade of jealousy in us, if we are fathers.

On the contrary, we will be delighted. We will rejoice that it is going well with them.

If we are jealous of a younger brother's ministry or influence or spiritual advancement, we are certainly teachers, and not fathers. In a school, if a student can solve a problem that his teacher cannot solve, the teacher will be so angry and jealous, that he will seek to humiliate that student ever after in some way or the other. How do we feel as servants of God when someone points out a mistake in us?

Teachers can only build Babylon. Only fathers can build the true church - the New Jerusalem. We may understand and proclaim all the truths of the new covenant, and yet if we do this with the spirit of a teacher we will still build Babylon.

A teacher is very conscious of all the labour that he has invested in his students. He thinks of the honour he will receive if his students do well. He is always thinking of what he will gain, even when his students do well. A father however is quite different. He desires only the welfare of his children. He desires nothing for himself.

A teacher will criticise his students. A father however will encourage his children. If we keep on criticizing the brothers and sisters, we will accomplish little, even if everything we say is true. A father will accomplish much more by encouraging his children.

Only a father can continue to be kind to ungrateful and evil children. A teacher will give up on ungrateful students very quickly.

When we have problems with difficult brothers in the assembly, if we hope that they will leave the assembly, even if they destroy themselves, then it should be clear to us that our spirit is that of a teacher. A father can never wish that for any of his children.

Jesus told us to be merciful even as our heavenly Father is merciful and kind to ungrateful and evil people (Lk.6:35,36).

As we pursue righteousness, we can very easily degenerate into Pharisees and teachers, if we don't seek to be constantly and endlessly merciful.

A Father And An Older Brother

From the parable of the prodigal son, we can learn something of the depth of God's love for those who backslide from him and even exploit His goodness towards them. There we learn so much about the Divine nature - and that is the nature that we are to partake of.

We see in that parable a striking contrast between the attitude of that wayward boy's older brother and his father. That is the contrast between a teacher and a father too.

The older brother was an upright person. But he had no love or concern for his younger brother. He only found fault with him. That is how many Christian leaders are too. They are quick to lose their temper and to criticise and scold their brothers and sisters.

But look at the father in that story. What a different spirit he had. That is a picture of what God is like. And when we partake of God's nature, we too will become like that. The older brother remembers all the evil that his younger brother has done, and delights in exposing it all. The father however, doesn't even want to think of it.

To be converted from being an unbeliever to a believer is one thing. But if we are to be servants of the new covenant, we need a second conversion - from being "an older brother" to being "a father", from being "Pharisee-like" to being "Christ-like".

Is there a brother who has rebelled against your authority as a servant of God, and who has spoken a lot of evil against you, even though you have done him only good for many years? What is your attitude towards him now? Is it the attitude of a teacher or of a father?

We are not tested through the good and wholehearted brothers in the church as much as through the rebellious ones.

One or two rebellious brothers can show us our true spiritual condition more than a hundred spiritual brothers - because those difficult brothers have a way of bringing into the light, the lusts that are hidden in the nooks and corners of our flesh.

That is why we are exhorted "to give thanks for ALL men" - and not just for the wholehearted

believers (1 Tim. 2:1). Everyone we come across helps towards our sanctification in some way or the other.

Here you are, living for years under the deception that you are a spiritual father. And then a difficult brother arises in your church. And in no time at all you discover, through your attitude towards him, that you are really a teacher and not a father!

That difficult brother enabled you to see your true condition in a way that all the wholehearted brothers in the church could not show you for so many years. Shouldn't you be thankful for such a brother who saved you from deceiving yourself forever?

When we find it difficult to bear with brothers who rub us the wrong way, it is good to recognise that we ourselves must have caused inconveniences and problems for others in the same way too, without our even being aware of it. They too must have found it difficult to bear with us!

None of us are perfect. We all have a flesh. And everyone who has a flesh has to bear with others who have a similar flesh. Others who are more mature than us can see un-Christlike areas in our behaviour, which we, in all sincerity, are unable to see ourselves.

You may imagine that even though you have a difficult wife, you are still bearing with her and loving her and having no complaints against her. You may even be secretly congratulating yourself on your "Christ-like" behaviour. But you may not realise that your wife probably feels the same way about you! She may be feeling that she has a difficult husband to live with and bear with!!

And so it is good for us to dwell in low thoughts about ourselves always. It is good to recognise that we have faults that we cannot see.

The prodigal son's behaviour brought out the goodness of his father's heart in a remarkable way. If he had always been a good boy at home, he would never have seen his father's tremendous goodness.

Whenever a similar problem crops up in our assembly (or in our home for that matter), with some brother (or family-member), we should think of it is an occasion when God wants to bring out His father-heart through us, towards that erring person - whether that person be a brother, or wife, or son, or daughter.

How disappointed God is in such situations, when we manifest the heart of a teacher instead.

Has someone taken your goods, and gone away, and ruined your name and the good name of your assembly by his conduct? What will you do, if he comes back repentant, one day? How are you going to receive him? Will you put him in the servant's quarters for a few months on probation, to find out if his repentance is genuine?

Or will you rejoice like the prodigal's father and run up to him and embrace him, and give him a warm welcome home? It all depends on what you are - a father or a teacher. A teacher may also receive a prodigal back, but it won't be with a warm heart!

There's joy in heaven over every soul who repents. If we cannot share in that joy, something is seriously wrong with us.

The older brother of the prodigal had the spirit of a teacher. He said to his father, "See how I've lived all these years. I've done nothing wrong. I've been wholehearted and zealous. I've been working for you faithfully. But see how this son of yours has behaved."

A teacher is always comparing his own goodness and faithfulness with the failures of the carnal ones in the church. He is occupied more with the shortcomings of his brothers than with the riches of God's grace. That was the primary characteristic of the Pharisees in Jesus' day. All those who have the spirit of a teacher are Pharisees.

There was some truth in what the older brother of the prodigal said - that his younger brother had indeed "devoured his father's wealth". But who told him that the money had been "spent on harlots"? That was an assumption. And that is characteristic of a teacher. Whenever he is against anyone, he always assumes the worst and believes the worst about him. He also delights in exposing the sins of an offender to put him to shame.

When we accuse another, it is no use saying that our facts are 100% right? Our spirit can still be

100% wrong, because it is in fellowship with the Accuser of the brethren (Rev.12:10).

When Satan accuses God's children to Him, you can be certain that his facts are all 100% right. He wouldn't dare tell lies to God. But his spirit is still the spirit of accusation.

That can be true of us too, if we are not careful. So let us not find any comfort in saying that we have carefully verified all the facts and found them to be true. Our spirit can still stink of Hell.

On the other hand, if we are fathers, we will cover the multitude of sins that a brother has committed, and rejoice that he has now repented. We will "kill the fattened calf and rejoice". This is a great height to attain to. But we must press on until we reach there. Let us not deceive ourselves imagining that we have attained to it already.

Let us ask God for His grace to be true fathers to others.

David And Absalom

There was a time in David's life, when his son Absalom schemed against him, and won the hearts of many of the Israelites and drove David from the throne.

But David still had a few friends who were first-class soldiers who wanted to fight and defend him. David knew that they were going to fight with Absalom. And so he said to his general Joab, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom" (2 Sam 18:5).

We must have those words written in bold letters in front of our minds whenever we have to deal with difficult brothers in the church: "DEAL GENTLY WITH THAT PERSON - FOR THE LORD'S SAKE."

Later, when David heard that Absalom had been killed, he wept and said, "O Absalom, I wish I had died in your place" (2 Sam. 18:33).

David was no teacher! He had a father-heart towards a rebellious son. No wonder he was called a man after God's own heart.

God's heart has the same desire: "I wish I could die in your place." And that was why Jesus died in our place on Calvary. It is when we enter into fellowship with God's heart that we become fathers.

Jesus had the right to rebuke sin in man, because He was willing to die to deliver man from sin. We have no right to rebuke sin in another until we are willing to die to deliver him from sin.

Then only are we true fathers. Otherwise we are only teachers.

Shepherds And Hirelings

In Ezekiel 34:3-6, the Lord rebukes the shepherds of Israel.

He rebuked them for eating the fat of the sheep and clothing themselves with their wool. They had not strengthened the sickly, nor healed the diseased, nor bound up the wounded sheep. They had not gone out to bring back the scattered sheep, nor protected the sheep from wild animals. Instead they had ruled the sheep with force and severity. They were hirelings and not true shepherds.

Hirelings are like teachers. They seek their own and work for pay.

In contrast, we see in verses 11-16 how a true shepherd behaves. He cares for his sheep, feeds them, leads them to rest, seeks the lost sheep, brings back the backslidden ones, and strengthens the sick ones. A good shepherd even lays down his life for the sheep.

A spiritual father is such a shepherd to his flock.

This is our calling as servants of the new covenant.

We must not think of our ministry as consisting merely of preaching in the meetings. Maybe there is some discouraged brother somewhere who needs a visit and a word of encouragement. Someone else may need deliverance because he is being oppressed by Satan.

We have to look at all such people as lambs that have been captured by Satan the lion (1 Pet.5:8). Like David, we must go out against the lion, attack it, and deliver the lambs out of its mouth (1 Sam.17:34,35). That is how a true shepherd acts. When he comes across a difficult brother, he fights with Satan, and doesn't criticise the brother. Thus he delivers the lamb from the lion's mouth.

Haven't we all seen fathers and mothers sitting up with their sick children, by their bedsides the whole night, caring for them?

Teachers have no time for such self-denying care. They will only tell their sick students to come back to school after they get well.

It is when we have spiritually sick brothers in our midst, that we discover whether we are actually fathers or teachers.

If you have a difficult wife, you will soon discover whether you are a shepherd-husband or a hireling-husband. If you had a spiritual wife however, you might never have discovered your true state!

God told the shepherds in Ezekiel's time that Israel had gone to Babylon because of the failure of their shepherds.

Many of God's people are dwelling in Babylon today, for the same reason : Their shepherds have failed them.

1 Timothy 3:1 says that if a man aspires to be an elder in a church, he is desiring a fine work. Yes, it is certainly a fine work to be a blessing and a help to others in the church, as a spiritual father.

May none of us however desire the title and the honour of being known as elders and servants of God. May God help us to take this matter seriously.

CHAPTER SEVEN

BUILDING THE CHURCH

The ultimate purpose of God in the new covenant is not to produce a number of Christ-like individuals, but to produce "ONE NEW MAN" - one Body in Christ (Eph.2:15,16).

Under the old covenant, God raised up a Moses, an Elijah and a John the Baptist. They were all lone men who stood for God as witnesses in their generation. But the church was a mystery hidden from them all. Israel could become only a congregation of individuals, and not a body. In a body, all the members are inter-related, with each having a personal and inward connection with the head.

When Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant came, He sent out His disciples two by two. They were no longer to be lone witnesses unto Him. He also told them that His presence would be powerfully manifest wherever at least two of His disciples were united in His Name (Matt.18:18-20) - because where two are united in Jesus' Name, there is a representation of the Body of Christ.

As servants of the new covenant, we must never rest satisfied with individual brothers and sisters becoming godly. The local assembly itself must be a representation of the Body of Christ. Otherwise we have failed to fulfil God's highest purpose.

The Presence Of God

What is the primary mark of a new-covenant church? Many think that it is having a particular pattern of church government and a particular form of meeting. But it is neither of these. The important thing about the church is that it should have Divine life .

When a baby is being formed in its mother's womb, in its early weeks it does not even have the shape (pattern) of a human being. It only has life. The shape (pattern) comes later. It is the same when a new church is being established anywhere. It will take time for the proper pattern to emerge. But meanwhile there must be life.

The primary mark of a new-covenant church is that God is present in its midst. When the church comes together, and everyone prophesies under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, those who come to the meeting should be convicted of their sins and acknowledge that God is present in the meeting (1 Cor.14:24,25). That, and that alone proves that such a church has the right pattern.

If the presence of God is absent, we must confess that we have come short of God's perfect plan - and we must repent.

Consider the tabernacle that the Israelites made in the wilderness. Its pattern was written down clearly

in the book of Exodus. The Philistines could easily have made a similar tabernacle.

But there was one thing that they could never have reproduced - and that was God's presence in the Most Holy Place, manifested as a fiery flame lighting up the tabernacle. That was the most important part of the tabernacle. It is the same with the church.

You may see a powerful church somewhere, and imagine that its secret is the pattern it follows in its meetings, or the doctrines it preaches!! And so you imitate that pattern, and preach the same doctrines, and imagine that you have a new-covenant church. But you are deceiving yourself. Without the glory of God being powerfully present in your midst, there is no new-covenant church there at all.

When God is powerfully present in our midst as a church, His light will continually show us what is pleasing to Him and what isn't. That light will warn us of dangers that lie ahead. It will not only drive away the darkness, but the prince of darkness as well. The powers of Hell will never be able to prevail against such a church.

It is no use having only our doctrines right in the church. What we need more than anything else is the presence of God.

The Spirit Of Prophecy

When God is present in our midst, we will hear Him speaking to us powerfully in the meetings. That is the meaning of prophecy.

In old covenant times, prophecy was meant for foretelling the future and for guiding people as to what they should do. But now, in the new covenant, prophecy is for exhortation (challenging, rebuking and correcting people), consolation (comforting and encouraging people) and edification (building up the church) (1 Cor.14:3).

Prophecy is the main gift of the Spirit by which the church is built. The prophetic word is "a lamp shining in a dark place" (2 Pet.1:19). Without this light constantly burning in the church, it will be impossible to escape the wiles of the prince of darkness. The church itself will sink into darkness. The main reason why many Christian groups that started out well degenerated over a period of time was because the gift of prophecy gradually disappeared.

Whenever God's presence departed from Israel in Old Testament times, one mark of His forsaking them was that "there was no longer any prophet" among them (Psa.74:1,9).

Israel always degenerated whenever they did not have a prophet, as in the days of Eli (See 1 Sam.3:1). But Israel rose into a place of eminence when they had a prophet, as in the days of Samuel (1 Sam.3:20). It was through Samuel that David was anointed as the king of Israel. And that began a glorious new era in Israel's history.

When Samuel prophesied, "the Lord did not allow any of his words to fall to the ground" (1 Sam.3:19 - KJV).

We too must pray earnestly for such a powerful ministry of prophecy in the church that every word we speak goes straight home to people's hearts like an arrow to its mark.

Through the gift of prophecy, "the secrets of people's hearts are disclosed" (1 Cor.14:25). Thus everyone in the church will get light on the deceitfulness of sin.

We are commanded to "exhort one another daily (in the church), lest we be hardened through the DECEITFULNESS of sin" (Heb.3:13). There are sins that are obvious and there are sins that are subtle and hidden. But the spirit of prophecy will expose both the deceitfulness of sin as well as the schemes of Satan, so that we are protected.

We see an illustration of this in the Old Testament. When the king of Aram was warring against Israel, every time he and his generals planned in secret to attack Israel at a certain point, his plans were revealed to the king of Israel by Elisha, through prophecy (2 Kings 6:8-12). Thus the king of Israel knew exactly where to place his army to defend the country, and saved his nation again and again.

That is how the Lord, through prophecy in the church-meetings, warns us in advance of the areas where Satan is going to attack us in the coming days. So we can be on our guard in those areas.

Paul exhorted Timothy to fight the good fight (against Satan) by paying attention to the prophecies

made concerning him (1 Tim.1:18).

Again and again, we have found in the church in Bangalore, that the spirit of prophecy in our meetings has warned many brothers and sisters in advance of the points at which they were going to face the enemy's attacks in the days that followed. Through the prophetic word, God has given wisdom to everyone of us in the church - wisdom for our personal life, for our family life, and for our church-life.

Proverbs 24:3,4 says, "By WISDOM a house is built, and by KNOWLEDGE the rooms are filled with pleasant and precious riches".

There is a place for knowledge in the church - God's Word taught by anointed teachers. But knowledge is like the furniture, with which a house is furnished after it has been built by WISDOM.

So if we only have Bible-knowledge in our churches, we will be like a family living on an empty plot of ground with a lot of expensive furniture around us, but with no house - no walls, no roof and not even a floor!! That's why we are exhorted in the New Testament to pursue after WISDOM first of all. "If anyone lacks wisdom let him ask God who gives liberally to all" (Jas.1:4).

It is through wisdom that the church is built. And God's wisdom comes to the church through the gift of prophecy.

That is why we must "earnestly seek to prophesy" (1 Cor.14:1,5), in every meeting of the church. Meetings for Bible-study and evangelism are good. But if we are to build the church as a pure testimony for Christ, then the gift of prophecy must be given the FIRST place.

The Pillar And Support Of The Truth

In 1 Timothy 3:15, the church is called the pillar and support of the truth. God desires all men to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim.2:4). What is this truth that God wants all men to know? In John 8:32, Jesus said, "You shall know the truth and the truth will make you free." Truth is that which sets people free from sin (Jn.8:34).

All bondage of every sort arises because we don't know the truth. Cultists hold their followers in bondage by keeping them ignorant of the truth. The more we know of the truth, the more free we will become. The Spirit of the Lord brings liberty (2 Cor.3:17).

In John 16:13, Jesus told His disciples, "When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth." The Holy Spirit is called "the Spirit of truth", because He seeks to lead us into all the truth.

Truth is a vast land like the land of Canaan. And even as God led the Israelites to possess Canaan little by little, the Holy Spirit also desires to lead us to possess all of the truth. The more we know of the truth, the more we will be set free - from sin, from people's opinions and from unScriptural religious traditions etc.,

So when the Church is called "the pillar and support of the truth", it means that the church must be a place where people come to hear the truth and are set more and more free. If people are not being liberated in our churches, we are failing in our ministry.

To set people free, we need the word of truth (God's Word) and the Spirit of truth (the Holy Spirit). Jesus prayed to the Father saying, "Sanctify them in the truth. Thy word is truth" (Jn.17:17). God's Word is the truth that sanctifies people. We cannot build the church if we don't have God's Word expounded regularly in the church in the power of the Holy Spirit. To be true servants of God and of the new covenant, we must become men of the Word and men of the Spirit.

For the church itself to be the pillar and support of the truth, there must be anointed brothers and sisters in the church who have become pillars themselves. In Revelation 3:12, the Lord tells us that if we overcome, He will make us pillars in His church. No-one other than Jesus Himself can make us pillars in the church. We can't make ourselves pillars, nor can any servant of God appoint us as pillars.

But the Lord makes all overcomers - brothers and sisters - pillars in His church. Even a sister can be a pillar, if she is an overcomer.

We mustn't forget however, that pillars are built to support a building's weight. So when the Lord makes us pillars in His church, it will be to bear the burdens of others. Those who are selfish and unwilling to bear such burdens do not qualify to become pillars.

There are many brothers who are not elders, but who are still pillars in the churches. If we are overcomers in our daily life, we can be pillars, even if we do not hold any position of leadership. It is God alone Who appoints and attests people as pillars in His church.

Spiritual Authority

A servant of God must be one who speaks with spiritual authority. We read that Jesus taught with spiritual authority, unlike the scribes (Mt.7:29). We cannot build the church if we don't have spiritual authority. The scribes knew the doctrine, but they did not have spiritual authority in their ministry.

We can assert our authority over others by our age, our education, our Bible knowledge or our soul-power. But none of these are the basis for spiritual authority. We must be attested by God.

If we have spiritual authority, we won't force our views on others. People will have confidence in us, because they recognize the authority of God in us. If we impose our authority on others just because we are in a position of leadership, then we have not understood spiritual authority at all. Our attitude towards others should be like that of Elihu who said, "No fear of me should terrify you, nor should my pressure weigh heavily on you." (Job 33:7).

Do others feel any pressure from you in any area? Or do you give them perfect freedom to act according to their conscience?

When people recognise that we have Divine authority, they will come to us themselves, for advice. If they don't consult us, it proves that they don't have any confidence in us.

Consider an example: When our children are small, it is easy for us as fathers to impose our will on them and to compel them to consult us in their every decision. But when they grow up and set up their own homes, then we discover whether they really have confidence in us or not. If they do, they will consult us voluntarily.

That is how we know in the church also, whether others have confidence in us or not. Do they consult us voluntarily?

If they feel more free to go to a younger brother for advice, that would indicate that they have more confidence in him. There is no need to be jealous of such a brother. We should rejoice that God has a spiritual man in the church whom people can go to for help.

In Matthew 18:18, Jesus told His disciples of the authority that the church has to bind evil Satanic forces, and to set bound people free. This authority, He said, could never be exercised by one person, but only by a minimum of two people - and these two must be in total agreement in their spirits, for only then would the Lord be mightily present in their midst to give them His authority (Matt.18:19,20).

"Where two or three have gathered together in My Name, there I am in their midst" (Matt.18:20) is one of the most misunderstood verses in the New Testament. That verse is not referring to any two or three people gathering together as Christians. No. It is referring to the authority of the church (see verses 15-18), exercised by two or three who have been gathered by the Holy Spirit, and who are united in spirit, for the glory of the Name of Jesus. Such a Body will have tremendous authority to bind Satan's activities and to free God's people from the grip of Satan. This is the authority that the elders of every church should be exercising constantly.

We cannot bind Satan or his demons themselves - as some ignorant believers seek to do - for God will do that only when Jesus returns (Rev.20:1,2; See Matt.8:29 also). But we can bind (restrain) the activities of Satan and his demons (2 Thess.2:7).

Satan knows about this authority that two or three leaders acting in perfect unison have. And so he will do his best to prevent the leaders in every church from coming to unity. If there is no unity at the leadership level, the Body of Christ can never be built.

It is not serious if two or three members in a church are not united. That is sad, but not as serious as the leaders not being one. Every church must have a core of two or three leaders who are totally one. The Lord is not looking for 200 or 300 who are united - but for just two or three in the leadership who are really one. There His authority will be powerfully present.

Warnings - Men Who Sought Their Own

If God sees that we are building our own kingdom, or running a one-man show, He will just leave us alone. There are plenty of such one-man shows in Christendom today. They say they are doing “Christian work”. But it is done for personal profit - either to gain money or to gain honour. And so they are all building Babylon.

God cannot be fooled. He will never attest such preachers, even if they gather many followers. They may build old-covenant congregations, but they will not be able to build the new-covenant church.

In Acts 5:36, we read of a Theudas who gathered 400 people to follow him. A church having 400 members can look quite impressive. But “it came to nothing”. We also read of a Judas who drew many people after him. “He too perished” (Acts 5:37).

There have always been people like that in the history of Christendom. But to build the Body of Christ is quite a different matter. We may gather 400 people in our city. Yet we will be no better than Theudas, if we are seeking our own. God will never back us up. Spiritual authority is so tremendously valuable that God won’t give it to anyone and everyone.

Judas Iscariot must have got quite a reputation by being part of Jesus’ team! People respected Jesus so highly. And Judas must have got a share of that honour too. But it did not change his self-centred nature. He still perished.

In the same way, Demas was a co-worker of the apostle Paul. It must have been a great honour to be on Paul’s team. Many believers respected Paul highly, and Demas also got a share of that honour by being associated with Paul. But inside his heart he did not have Paul’s self-denying, sacrificial spirit. Demas mingled closely with godly, selfless brothers like Timothy. But he did not imbibe their spirit.

That happened in Jesus’ time and in Paul’s time. And it is happening even today. There are brothers who have got a reputation for themselves, not through their own life or ministry, but just by their being associated with some other godly brother whom God has mightily attested to.

If we are like that, our end can also be like that of Judas Iscariot and Demas. We cannot have Divine authority merely by being associated with some godly brother. It is when we have cleansed ourselves from seeking our own gain, our own name, our own comfort, our own convenience, and everything that is ours, that God will back us up. Then alone will we have spiritual authority to build the Body of Christ.

Do we seek to build God’s kingdom or our own kingdom? God sees our hearts. Paul once said that he did not have a single co-worker with him like Timothy. All were seeking their own, and not the things of Christ. Timothy alone was genuinely concerned about building the Body of Christ (Phil.2:19-21).

Sacrificing Everything

We would all like to have the authority that a man like Paul had. But to have that, we have to give up everything like he did, and consider it all as worthless rubbish (Phil.3:7-9).

Jesus said to the Father, “All that is mine is Thine.” And so He could also add, “All that is Thine is Mine” (Jn.17:10). When all that is ours is freely given to God, then all that God has will also be freely given to us. In the measure that we give to Him, He gives to us. This is why many Christian leaders are so poverty-stricken when it comes to spiritual authority: They have not given their all to God.

In John 2:23-25, we read that even though many believed in Jesus, yet He did not commit Himself to them. We may also be among those to whom the Lord doesn’t commit Himself because He sees what is in us, and what our motives are.

If it comes to a choice between our profession and building the Body of Christ, which will we choose? Are we willing to give up advancement in our earthly occupation in order to have more time to build the church? If not, why should God commit Himself to us?

Are we willing to open our homes for the Lord’s people? Or are our convenience and our privacy more important to us? If we seek our own in any area, we won’t get spiritual authority from God, even if we fast and pray for it. God cannot be fooled.

Everything - yes everything - in our life must take second place to the kingdom of God, if we want to build the Body of Christ. There is no partiality with God. All of us are the same to Him. What He has done for others he will do for us. Jesus and Paul were mightily attested by God in their ministries, because

they paid a price. God will do the same for us, if we are willing to pay the same price.

Even our money and our savings must belong to God if we are to build the church. When God told Noah to build the ark, Noah did not ask God as to who was going to pay for the expenses involved in building such a huge ship. If he had asked that question, God would have told him, "You have to pay for it yourself, Noah. Who else will pay for it?" But Noah did not need to ask, for he knew that already.

The question is whether we know it. Noah probably had to sell some of his own property in order to build the ark. But how many servants of God do we find who are willing to sell their personal property in order to finance God's work? Those who do not give their all to God will discover that God does not give His all to them either.

With most servants of God, their attitude is that if it is the Lord's work, the money for it must come from somewhere else, and not from their own pockets. They are lavish in spending the money that comes in through the offering-box. But they are not lavish in giving their own money for the work of God. A servant of God who is not freed from the grip of money in his life can never have spiritual authority.

Have we ever said to the Lord, "Lord, Your work is my work. And my savings are Yours. I won't make a distinction between my money and Your money"? If we haven't said that to the Lord (and meant it), then we are still under the old covenant, where they considered 10% of their money as belonging to God and 90% as belonging to themselves. Once they had given their 10%, their obligation was over.

But Jesus did not come to give only 10% of His income to the Father. He came to establish a new covenant and to build a new-covenant church. And so He gave 100% to His Father. And now He says to us, "Follow Me." The only one who can have spiritual authority is the one who has given his ALL to God.

We must be willing to build the Body of Christ, whatever the cost to us - whether that cost be our money, our honour, our convenience, our physical energy, our reputation, our job, or anything else. There should be no limit to what we are willing to sacrifice for the Lord's sake. We are not to seek our own convenience or our own comfort in anything. Everything we do must be related to building the Body of Christ. Even our earthly occupation must only be a means of earning our living, so that we don't become a burden to others in the church for our financial support.

Let us then repent of our miserly attitude towards God.

May we be rich towards God in the coming days, so that we can have spiritual authority in our lives and build the Body of Christ in our land for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER EIGHT

GOD NEEDS MEN

God needs men today -

- * men who will stand before His face and hear His voice daily;
- * men who have no desire in their heart for anyone or anything other than God Himself;
- * men who fear God so greatly that they hate sin in every form and love righteousness and truth in all their ways;
men who have overcome anger and sexually sinful thoughts, and who would rather die than sin even in thought or attitude;
- * men whose daily life-style is one of taking up the cross and pressing on to perfection, and who are constantly working out their own salvation with fear and trembling;
- * men full of the Holy Spirit, who are so rooted and grounded in love that nothing can ever move them into an unloving attitude towards another human being, however great the provocation;
- * men who are so rooted and grounded in humility that neither human praise nor spiritual growth, neither a Divinely-endorsed ministry nor anything else will be able to make them lose the awareness

of their being less than the least of all the saints;

- ★ men who have an understanding of God's nature and purposes through His Word, and who tremble at that Word so that they will not disobey even the smallest commandment or neglect to teach it to others;
- ★ men who will proclaim the whole counsel of God and expose religious harlotry and unScriptural human traditions;
- ★ men who have the revelation of the Holy Spirit on the secret of godliness, on Christ having come in the flesh and opened a new and living way through the flesh;
- ★ men who are diligent and hardworking, but who also have a sense of humour, and who know how to relax and play with children and enjoy God's good gifts in nature;
- ★ men who are not ascetics, but who at the same time live a disciplined life and who are not afraid of hardships;
- ★ men who have no interest in expensive clothing or sight-seeing and who will not waste their time in unprofitable activities or their money in unnecessary purchases;
- ★ men who have mastered their desire for fancy foods and who are not enslaved to music or sport or any other legitimate activity;
- ★ men who have been disciplined successfully by God in the fires of affliction, abuse, tribulation, false accusation, physical sickness, financial hardships and opposition from relatives and religious leaders;
- ★ men full of mercy, who can sympathise with the worst of sinners and the worst of believers, and have hope for them, because they consider themselves to be the foremost of all sinners;
- ★ men who are so deeply rooted in the security of the love of their Heavenly Father that they are never anxious about anything, or afraid of Satan or evil men or difficult situations or anything;
- ★ men who have entered into God's rest, believing in the sovereign working of God in all matters for their best and who therefore give thanks always, for all men, for all things and in all circumstances;
- ★ men who find their joy in God alone and who are therefore full of the joy of the Lord, having overcome all bad moods;
- ★ men of living faith, who have no confidence in themselves or their natural abilities, but complete confidence in God as their unfailing Helper in all situations;
- ★ men who live, not by the promptings of their own reason, but by the leading of the Holy Spirit;
- ★ men who have been genuinely baptized in the Holy Spirit and fire by Christ Himself (and not just thrilled by some emotional counterfeit or convinced by some theological argument);
- ★ men who are living constantly under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, endowed with the supernatural gifts that He has given them;
- ★ men who have revelation on the church as the Body of Christ (and not a congregation or a denomination), and who give all their energies, their material wealth and spiritual gifts to build that church
- ★ men who have learnt to bridle their tongues through the help of the Holy Spirit and whose tongues are now aflame with the Divine Word;
- ★ men who have forsaken all, who are not attached anymore to money or material things, and who desire no gifts from others;
- ★ men who can trust God for all their earthly needs and who never hint about their material needs or boast about their labours, either in their conversation or through letters and reports;
- ★ men who are not stubborn, but gentle, and open to criticism and eager for correction from older and wiser brothers;
- ★ men who have no desire to dominate or advise others (although ready to give advice when asked for), and who have no longing to be considered as 'elder' brothers, or leaders, but who only desire to be ordinary brothers and servants of all;
- ★ men who are easy to get along with, and who are willing to be inconvenienced and taken advantage of by others;
- ★ men who will make no distinction between the millionaire and the beggar, the white-skinned and the dark-skinned, the intellectual and the idiot and the cultured and the barbarian, but who will treat them

all alike;

- * men who can never be influenced by their wife, children, relatives, friends or other believers to cool off even slightly in their devotion to Christ or their obedience to God's commandments;
- * men who can never be bribed to compromise, by any reward that Satan may offer (whether honour or money or whatever);
- * men who are fearless witnesses for Christ, fearing neither religious heads nor secular rulers;
- * men who desire to please no human being on the face of the earth, and who are willing to offend all men, if necessary, in order to please God alone;
- * men for whom God's glory, God's will and God's kingdom always take priority over mere human need and their own comfort;
- * men who cannot be pressurised either by others or by their own reason into doing 'dead works' for God, but who are eager and content to do the revealed will of God for their lives alone;
- * men who have the discernment of the Spirit to distinguish between the soulish and the spiritual in Christian work;
- * men who look at things from a heavenly viewpoint and not an earthly one;
- * men who will refuse all earthly honours and titles offered them for their labours for God;
- * men who know how to pray without ceasing, and also how to fast and pray when needed;
- * men who have learnt to give generously, cheerfully, secretly and with wisdom;
- * men who are willing to be all things to all men, so that by all means they might save some;
- * men who have a longing to see others not only saved, but also made disciples of Christ, and brought to a knowledge of the truth and to obedience to all of God's commandments;
- * men who have a longing to see a pure testimony established for God in every place;
- * men who have a burning passion to see Christ glorified in the church;
- * men who do not seek their own in any matter;
- * men with spiritual authority and spiritual dignity;
- * men who will stand ALONE for God in the world, if need be;
- * *totally uncompromising men, like the apostles and prophets of old.*

God's work in the world suffers today, because such men are few in number.

Determine with all your heart that you will be such a man for God, in the midst of a sinful and adulterous generation and a compromising Christendom.

Since there is no partiality with God, it is possible for you too to be such a man, provided you yourself earnestly desire to be one.

Since God demands commitment and obedience only in the conscious area of one's life, it is possible for you to be such a man, even though the conscious area of your life may be limited. (That area will keep increasing as you walk in the light and press on to perfection).

There is no excuse then why you cannot be such a man.

Since nothing good dwells in the flesh, we have to seek for grace from God to have the virtues listed above.

Cry out to God daily then, that He will give you grace to be such a man in these the closing days of the age.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

"Thus says the Lord, 'I searched for a man among them..... who would stand before Me'" (Ezek.22:30).
