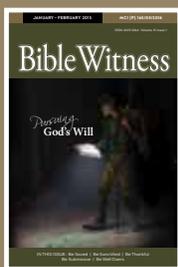


Bible Witness

Pursuing
God's Will



IN THIS ISSUE: Be Saved | Be Sanctified | Be Thankful
Be Submissive | Be Well Doers



Editor

Prabhudas Koshy

Assistant Editor

Ho Kee How

**Publishing & Circulation
Co-ordinator**

Lok Kwok Wah

Technical Editors

Adrienne Foo,
Jenny Lok, Lok Kwok Wah
Mah Lean Choo

Layout

Kenneth Wong

Illustration

Andronicus Koshy & Lynn Koh

Children's Page Illustration

Linus Kok

Publisher

Bible Witness Media Ministry of
Gethsemane Bible-Presbyterian Church
Singapore

Printer

Ee Tai Press Pte Ltd

Mailing Address

Bible Witness Media Ministry
510 Geylang Road, #02-06
Singapore 389466

Tel: (65) 6741 1910 **Fax:** (65) 6741 1016

E-mail: bwmm.gbpc@gmail.com

Website: www.biblewitness.com



CONTENTS

Pursuing God's Will

3 Editorial
4 It is God's Will that We Must
Be Saved
Ko Lingkang

8 It is God's Will that We Must
Be Sanctified
Clement Chew

11 It is God's Will that We Must
Be Thankful
Andrew Koh

14 It is God's Will that We Must
Be Submissive
Ho Kee How

20 It is God's Will that We Must
Be Well Doers
Prabhudas Koshy

Holy Land Bible Study Tour

24 Silent Witness of the Stones
Wai Mun and Jolyne Cho

25 Journey of Faith
Jenny Lok

Children's Page

28 Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556) - Part II

31 Bible Trivia - Exodus 21 & 22
Sarah Yong

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Editorial

Dear brethren,

Pursuing God's will should be the earnest ambition of every true child of God. Commitment to fulfil God's will is a definite characteristic of every child of God. Jesus said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). Anyone, who makes mere verbal confessions of faith but walks unconcerned about and disobedient to God's will, has no chance of entering the kingdom of heaven. Active obedience to the will of God is a decisive test of one's being in the kingdom of God.

It is easy enough to profess to be a lover of God, but to live the Christian life is not so easy. True religion is not empty talk but wholehearted commitment to do God's will. There must be perseverance in pursuing the will of God. Today there are too many presumptuous, self-made "instant" Christians, who have never brought forth fruits of righteousness nor proven their commitment to do His good will, especially if it entails self-sacrifice. Christians ought to be God-pleasers rather than self-pleasers or man-pleasers. They should live their lives "not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart" (Ephesians 6:6).

In this issue of Bible Witness, we would like to call our readers' attention to some of the specific God-ordained duties of every Christian, which are revealed in His Word. Our prayer and desire for all who read this issue is the same as that of Epaphras for the Colossian Christians: "that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God" (Colossians 4:12).

In Christ,
Prabhudas Koshy

It is God's Will that We Must Be Saved

KO LINGKANG



For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:3-4).

Introduction

John 3:16, probably the most famous verse in the Bible, tells us of the love of God. It was a love so great that He was willing to send His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to come to this world to die for our sins, in order that we may be saved. All we have to

do is to believe in Christ and we will have the gift of eternal life.

Having gone through the trouble to execute the entire plan of redemption, it is certainly God's desire for us to be saved. The Bible clearly states that God loves the world,

and this universal love that God has is what spurs Him to ensure that man in his lost and sinful state will have a way back to God. Furthermore, He did not just leave it to us to decide whether we want to be saved, for in our depraved state, we would never willingly seek after God (Romans 3:10-18). By His grace and mercy, God chose us even before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4-5), and then called us by His irresistible grace to lead us to salvation (Romans 8:14, 29-30). From start to finish, God alone was responsible for our salvation. Surely, having done all that, God has shown His desire for us to be saved!

This is what we see being explained in this passage before us. 1 Timothy 2:4 says that God “will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth”. What we see expressed here is God’s desire – not just for us who are already saved, but for all men! In this we see the infinite love of God shown to us, for in His goodness and compassion, He desires that all the people in the world would come to the saving knowledge of Him.

Yet, we know that although this is described as God’s will, the fact of the matter is that not all men are saved. There are many who would go through their whole lives without ever repenting of their sins and believing in the Lord. The Bible is clear that the fate of these unregenerate people is eternal judgment in hell. Does this then contradict 1 Timothy 2:4? If it is God’s will for all men to be saved, why is it that not all are saved? What aspect of God’s will is Paul talking about in this verse?

Are You Saved?

However, before we wade into the theological debate over God’s will, we must first address a more fundamental issue – “Am I saved?” If it is God’s will for all men to be saved,

shouldn’t we be concerned whether we are counted among this domain of “all men”? Surely, we must consider this most crucial point first, i.e. whether we ourselves have fulfilled this aspect of God’s will, namely that we are saved and have come to the knowledge of the truth.

God, the author of our salvation, is the one who is responsible for our salvation from the beginning to the end. While we commonly refer to Christ Jesus as our Saviour – for it is through His life, death and resurrection that we are saved – yet we must also remember that God the Father has a very crucial role to play. It is “the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man” (Titus 3:4; 2:10-11) that has extended His grace towards us, to elect us, call us, and forgive us of our sins. God the Father is the source and architect of our salvation, for it is by His sovereign decree that He chooses us unto salvation.

God our Saviour is emphatically portrayed as a God who “will have all men to be saved”. This intimates how believers are delivered from the power and corruption of sin, and granted the promise of eternal life. This happens when men “come unto the knowledge of the truth”. The word for “knowledge” (*epignosis*) carries the idea of a full and precise, experiential sort of knowledge. It is far more than just an intellectual comprehension of the gospel; it speaks of a complete assimilation and understanding of God’s truth as found in His word. When we believe in the Lord and profess faith in Christ, this is what happens. Not just with our mind but with our whole heart, we understand, assent and embrace the truths of all that Jesus Christ has done in order to save us.

Yes, this is what God wills, because God our Saviour wants all of us to be saved and come unto the knowledge of His truth. The

most important thing for us is to make sure that we ourselves understand this first. Are you saved? Have you come to the knowledge of the truth?

Will All Men be Saved?

Yet the question still remains: will all men be saved? If that is God's desire, wouldn't He be able to fulfil it? Now, we must understand the matter is not about a question of God's power. Can He save all men? Surely He can! The infinite value of the Blood of Christ is enough to cleanse the sins of every single person who has ever lived and will ever live. Yet we know that it is not in God's plan to do so, for there are many who reject the knowledge of the truth and will never be saved. The question which we should ask is: why is that so? Why is it that even though it is God's will that all men be saved, yet not all men are saved?

At this juncture, we must understand the difference between the desire of God and the decrees of God. These can be seen as two distinct but not contradictory wills of God. This is explained clearly by Rev Timothy Tow in his book, "Clock of the Sevenfold Will of God". In it, he explains how there are various facets of the will of God. It is only when we understand each aspect better, that we can have a clearer perception of the complete will of God.

On the one hand, we have what is known as the desiderative will of God. This describes the longings or desires that God has, which He reveals to us through His word. Alongside our Scripture text at hand, God also reveals His desiderative will through passages like Ezekiel 18:23, 32 and 2 Peter 3:9. In each of these passages, God describes how He has no pleasure in the perishing of the wicked, but desires that they should repent and live. As Rev Tow explains: "It is of God's character not to exult like Nero

in the torture and death of his Christian subjects, nor like Hitler exterminating six million Jews with a stone-dead heart, but the very opposite. God is good, God is love. So it is in Himself to see sinners turn to Him in repentance, for He is not willing that any should perish."

On the other hand, while it is in God's desiderative will that all men be saved, it is however not necessarily so in His eternal decrees, what Rev Tow describes as God's decretive will. In God's perfect wisdom and eternal will, He has ordained that there would be some who are predestined to be saved. These are the ones whom the Bible describes as the elect, and are the ones who will certainly be called by the grace of God. How about the others who are not predestined? John 3:18 tells us "he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." Does this then make God unjust, and contradict His desiderative will? Certainly not, for there can be no evil or error in God! While He has a desire for all to be saved, it is also entirely His prerogative not to act on that desire. Instead, for reasons known only to Him, He has decreed that only some would be saved while the unrepentant would be judged and condemned.

We must understand and be very clear that even though it is God's choice as to who will be saved or not, the blame is not on God, but on the sinner. As Romans 9:19-23 explains, "Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known,

endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory"? Our sovereign God has every right to do as He wills, and He has in His perfect plan decreed that not all men will be saved. Yet the fault lies not in God, but in sinful men who reject God. All this is done "according to the good pleasure of his will" – and the aspect of God's will here is His decretive will.

So, while God in His desiderative will has a desire for all men to be saved, His decretive will is such that not all will be saved. This is a mystery which, though humanly difficult to comprehend, can nonetheless be humbly accepted and acknowledged, as highlighted by Paul in Romans 11:33-36, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen."

Do You Care for Others to be Saved?

So having understood what this verse is referring to, the final issue that we ought to address is: what then should our response be?

In the context of this passage, we realize that it is actually Paul's exhortation to Timothy concerning prayer, that his "supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks, be made for all men" (1 Timothy 2:1). We are taught who and what to pray for, in accordance with God's will. If we know that it is His will that all men be saved, then surely we ought to pray for

that. Having understood this to be God's desired will, should it not then be the topic of our earnest prayers? Just as God cares for the unsaved, we too must have a heart and passion for lost souls around us, and pray for their salvation.

Aside from praying for the salvation of the lost, there is also much that we can do to actively go out to win the lost. The great commission to every believer is to "go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). This is certainly a command that is very much in line with God's desire for all men to be saved. Rather than debating on whether a person is elect or not, and then wondering if we should share the gospel to him, we ought instead to remember God's desiderative will. When we go out to preach the gospel and witness to the people around us, we are doing the will of God, and bringing glory and pleasure to Him.



"It is of God's character not to exult like Nero in the torture and death of his Christian subjects, nor like Hitler exterminating six million Jews with a stone-dead heart, but the very opposite. God is good, God is love. So it is in Himself to see sinners turn to Him in repentance, for He is not willing that any should perish."

- Timothy Tow -

It is God's Will that We Must Be Sanctified

CLEMENT CHEW

“For this is the will of God,
even your sanctification”
(1 Thessalonians 4:3a).

The church of Thessalonica was founded by Paul during his second missionary journey. He had spent three Sabbath days ministering at the synagogue, preaching and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 17:1-4). Some Jews and God-fearing Gentiles believed in the Gospel. However, a riot instigated by Jewish opponents resulted in Paul and his team having to take premature leave of Thessalonica (Acts 17:5-10).

Despite the ejection of the missionaries from Thessalonica, the work of God continued unabated. A few months later, Paul sent Timothy to enquire about the state of the Thessalonian church. The report from Timothy was generally positive. However, there was some confusion in the church concerning Christ's second coming. The first epistle to the Thessalonians was therefore written to address this issue.

One of Paul's desires was for the Thessalonians to please God in their walk with Him (1 Thessalonians 4:1). Therefore, Paul exhorts in 1 Thessalonians 4:3a – “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification”.

The Doctrine of Sanctification Defined

The term “sanctification” comes from the Greek word *hagiazō*, which means “to make holy”, “to set apart for God”, “to consecrate” or “to purify”. When applied to the believer, it refers to the work of God that takes place in order to make the believer pure before Him.

There are three aspects of sanctification:

Positional Sanctification

This refers to the cleansing and redemption of the believers by the Blood of Christ upon conversion. At this point, they are set apart by God and are henceforth called “saints” (*hagiois*), i.e. “holy ones” or “sanctified ones”. It is this aspect of sanctification that is emphasised in Hebrews 10:10, “By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” Jude 1 also states that believers are sanctified when they are saved: “Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called”.

Positional sanctification teaches us that when a believer is saved, God sets the believer

apart to serve Him according to His will and His desire. Other passages which highlight the positional aspect of sanctification include Acts 20:32, 1 Corinthians 1:2 and 1 Corinthians 6:11.

Progressive Sanctification

This is the ongoing and experiential aspect of sanctification. It is the continual process of consecration and forsaking of sin, resulting in the believer becoming more and more like Christ. Peter exhorts the believers to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). Paul adds in 2 Corinthians 3:18, “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” As the believer is progressively sanctified, he will conform more and more to the image of Christ.

Progressive sanctification is effected through the Word of God. “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17). The Holy Spirit that indwells every believer will cause the believer to know and understand the truth, empowering him to obey the Word of God. When a believer is convicted by the Word of his sins, he can confess his sins to Christ who will sanctify and cleanse him of his sins. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

This aspect of progressive sanctification is well-expressed in the answer to Question 75 of the Westminster Larger Catechism: “Sanctification is a work of God’s grace, whereby they whom God has, before the foundation of the world, chosen to be holy, are in time, through the powerful operation of his Spirit applying the death and resurrection of Christ unto them, renewed in their whole man after the image of God;

having the seeds of repentance unto life, and all other saving graces, put into their hearts, and those graces so stirred up, increased, and strengthened, as that they more and more die unto sin, and rise unto newness of life.” As C. H. Spurgeon put it, “If he gives you the grace to make you believe, he will give you the grace to live a holy life afterwards.”

Permanent or Ultimate Sanctification

This refers to our final perfection, whereby our glorified and sinless bodies will be received at the coming resurrection. We will be presented faultless and without blemish in the presence of God. “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

The Doctrine of Sanctification Applied

Paul tells the Thessalonian Christians that the will and desire of God is their sanctification (1 Thessalonians 4:3a). How would these three aspects of sanctification come into play in the Christian’s walk to please God?

Firstly, the Christian is already positionally sanctified in Christ and is thus called a “saint” or “sanctified one”. It is therefore necessary for him to walk worthy of the high vocation and position to which he has been called. What a travesty it would be for one who is called a “holy and sanctified one” to be found in habitual sin and wickedness!

Secondly, a Christian is expected to be progressively sanctified. Since progressive sanctification is effected by God’s Word, a Christian should read God’s Word daily and walk in its precepts. He should also pray fervently that God will mould him to be

more Christ-like. He ought to have a strong desire to separate from sin and to manifest the fruit of the Spirit (cf. Galatians 5:16, 22-23).

Lastly, as the Christian has the sure hope of being perfectly sanctified, he should then all the more strive for purity and holiness during his time on earth. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (1 John 3:2-3).

Paul then proceeds to apply the doctrine of sanctification with respect to sexual purity. Since God demands sanctification and holiness, it is imperative that a believer must abstain from fornication (1 Thessalonians 4:3b). The Greek word for the

term "fornication" is *porneia*, where we get the English word "pornography". It denotes all forms of sexual immorality and sin. The Christian knows that he is set apart for God's service. He must then keep both his body and soul pure for the Lord's use, and to be a vessel clean and honourable before the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:4).

Conclusion

God's desire for our sanctification ought to cause us to be more circumspect in our walk with God, for He has called us unto holiness and not unto uncleanness (1 Thessalonians 4:7). Therefore, let us take heed of God's will to present ourselves as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable unto God, which is but our reasonable service. Amen.



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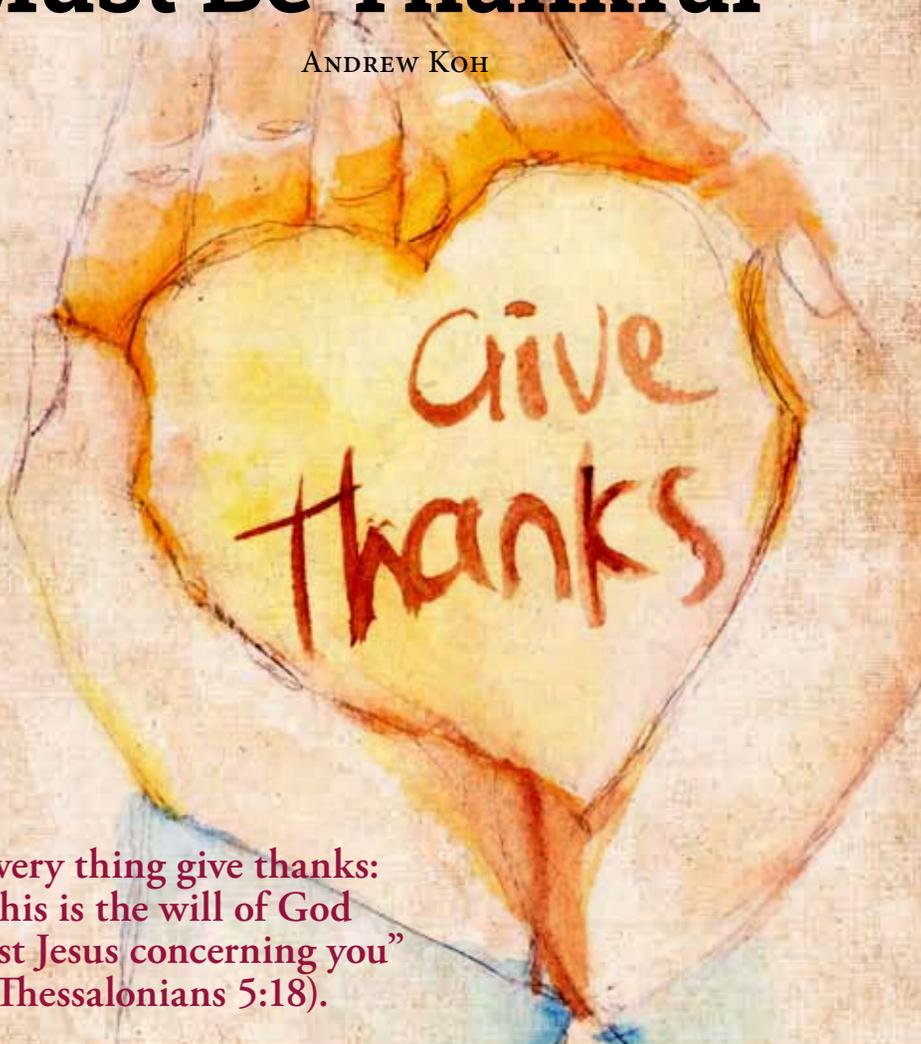
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Please send your support for Bible Witness that God's Word may reach more people. Your cheque may be made payable to Bible Witness.

(For more information, please refer to page 2.)

It is God's Will that We Must Be Thankful

ANDREW KOH



Give
Thanks

**“In every thing give thanks:
for this is the will of God
in Christ Jesus concerning you”
(1 Thessalonians 5:18).**

Introduction

Expressing thanks to one another is a natural and almost instinctive affair. We thank others when they have done us a favour. We thank the people whom we appreciate and are indebted to. We want them to know that we are grateful to them for what they have done for us. This is why we thank them.

Likewise, God exhorts Christians to give thanks to Him because we should be grateful to Him. Besides being grateful, are there other reasons for giving thanks to Him? In what kinds of situations are Christians supposed to do so? Has God provided us any example to follow? In this article, these questions shall be dealt with.

Scope of Thanksgiving - "In every thing give thanks"

The exhortation, "In every thing give thanks" (1 Thessalonians 5:18), was given during a time of great turmoil and difficulties for the Christians at Thessalonica. They had "received the word in much affliction" (1 Thessalonians 1:6). They were persecuted not due to any wrong that they had done, but because they believed in the Gospel. After their conversion, they suffered at the hands of the people whom they had once lived closely with (1 Thessalonians 2:14b). Close relationships and ties were broken because of their faith in God. Furthermore, some of them were going through a time of bereavement because their loved ones had passed away (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). During such a time, Paul, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, gave the exhortation: "In every thing give thanks".

The phrase "in every thing" sets the scope for Christians to give thanks, which is in all kinds of situations. It is a natural tendency for people to give thanks to God only when favourable things happen. Naturally, we also thank only the people who have done favours to us.

It is going against the grain for "the natural man" (1 Corinthians 2:14a) to thank God during especially difficult times. He will

even resort to blaming God for any tragic event that happens. We remember how Job's wife, when calamities befell her family, had lashed out: "curse God, and die" (Job 2:9b)! To be able to give thanks to God even in the most difficult of situations, we must understand God's intended reason for giving thanks to Him. Only then can we obey this biblical command meaningfully.

Reason for Thanksgiving - "for this is the will of God"

The next phrase in 1 Thessalonians 5:18 states the reason for giving thanks to Him: "for this is the will of God". Giving thanks to

God in all situations fulfils God's desire for every Christian. This Christian conduct is most pleasing to Him. It is not possible for a Christian to act in such a manner if he does not have a particular mindset unique to the truly born-again Christian. What is this mindset that enables a Christian to thank God even in difficult situations?

Christians are able to give thanks to God even in difficult situations because they remember their "appointment unto afflictions".

In 1 Thessalonians 3:4, the apostle Paul reminded the Thessalonian Christians that Christians "should suffer tribulation".

"Afflicted Christians are able to thank God because they hold on firmly to the correct perspective of God, even in times of difficulties. Present situations do not dictate how they view God. The attributes of God are the same, regardless of how dire the situations are."

It is inevitable that Christians should go through oppressions and difficult times. Thus, they should not “be moved by these afflictions” (1 Thessalonians 3:3). In other words, Christians are not to be emotionally disturbed by the persecutions that befall them because of their faith. Such difficult moments should come as no surprise. Instead, they are to expect such moments and are to be thankful for them. Such moments remind Christians of who they are. These difficult times assure Christians of their salvation. Because of their genuine faith, suffering Christians are partaking of the common lot of all those who are saved.

Furthermore, afflicted Christians are able to thank God because they hold on firmly to the correct perspective of God, even in times of difficulties. Present situations do not dictate how they view God. The attributes of God are the same, regardless of how dire the situations are. Afflicted Christians who are thankful do not lose sight of the fact that God is sovereign in the lives of His people. God is in full control and nothing happens to them by chance. Moreover, God continues to be loving in the midst of intense persecutions. His tender affection towards His children does not change according to the times. Therefore, a thankful Christian will say in his heart, “I may not understand what is happening to me right now, but I thank God for all my afflictions. I trust my loving God who is working out His sovereign good will in my life.”

Example of Thanksgiving - “in Christ Jesus concerning you”

God has not left us on our own but has provided the most excellent example for Christians to model themselves on, namely the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Jesus is in the will of the Heavenly Father at all times. He pleases the Father by His every thought and action. One of the recorded instances when

Jesus gave thanks was during the institution of the Lord’s Supper. Luke 22:19-20 records:

“And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.”

The bread and the cup that Jesus gave thanks for symbolize His body which would be broken and the blood that He would shed respectively. That meal which He gave thanks for was a precursor to His intense pain and suffering on the cross! Jesus maintained the spirit of thanksgiving even during the time imminent to His cruel death. This is the example for all afflicted Christians to follow; they are to thank God in all circumstances, even during the most difficult moments.

Conclusion

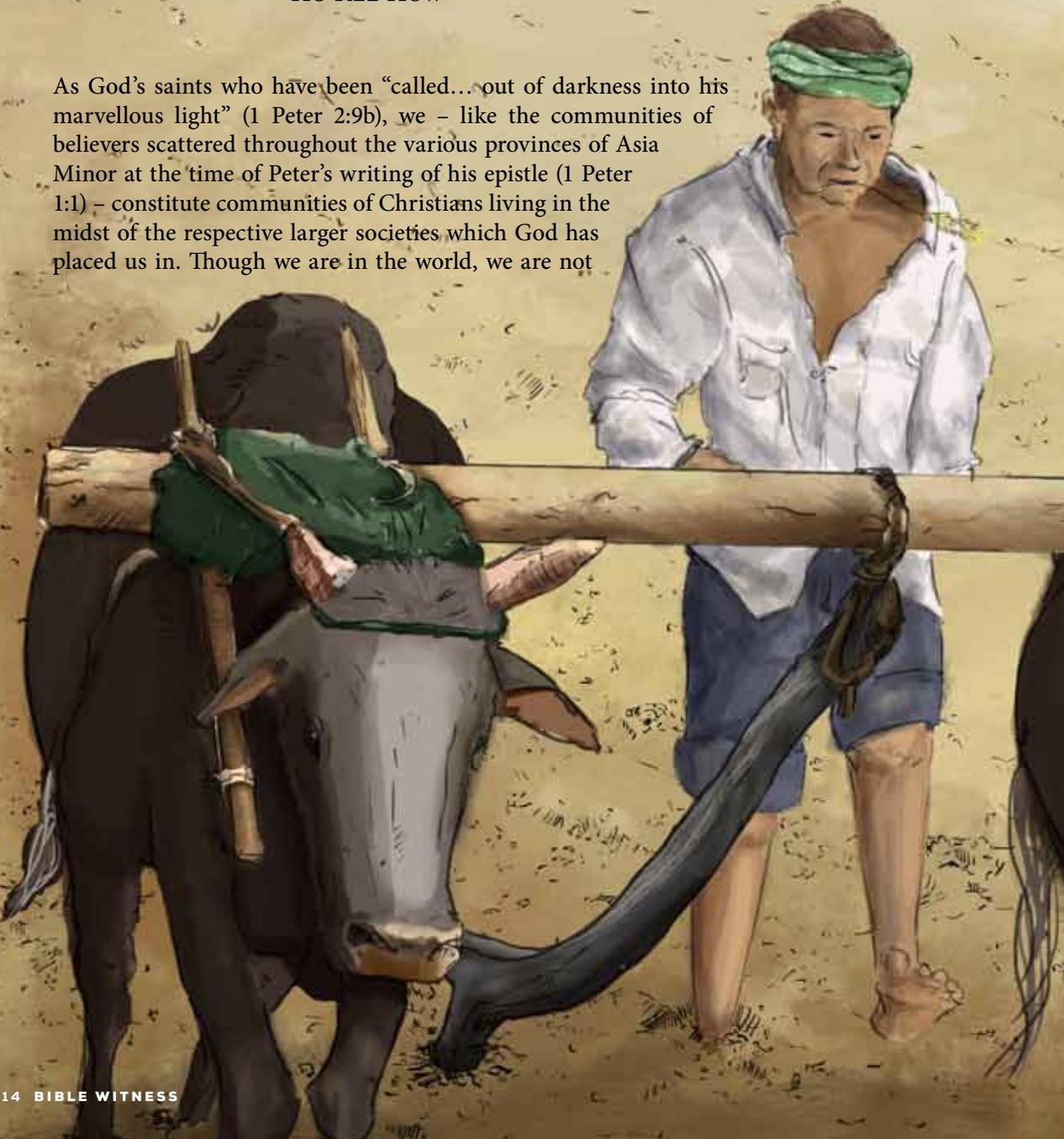
This phrase “Thank God!” is one that is frequently heard in the conversations of Christians. While it appears that Christians do often give thanks to God, has this phrase become a perfunctory expression and no longer a sincere and heartfelt one? May this phrase be one that is said sincerely from our hearts with proper understanding, irrespective of the kind of situation we find ourselves in, as is rightfully taught by the apostle Paul: “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thessalonians 5:18).



It is God's Will that We Must Be Submissive

HO KEE HOW

As God's saints who have been "called... out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Peter 2:9b), we – like the communities of believers scattered throughout the various provinces of Asia Minor at the time of Peter's writing of his epistle (1 Peter 1:1) – constitute communities of Christians living in the midst of the respective larger societies which God has placed us in. Though we are in the world, we are not



to be of the world, but rather “as strangers and pilgrims, (to) abstain from fleshly lusts” and to have our conduct “honest among the Gentiles” (1 Peter 2:11, 12a), that we “may be blameless and harmless... in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world” (Philippians 2:15; cf. Matthew 5:16).

God's Witness in the World

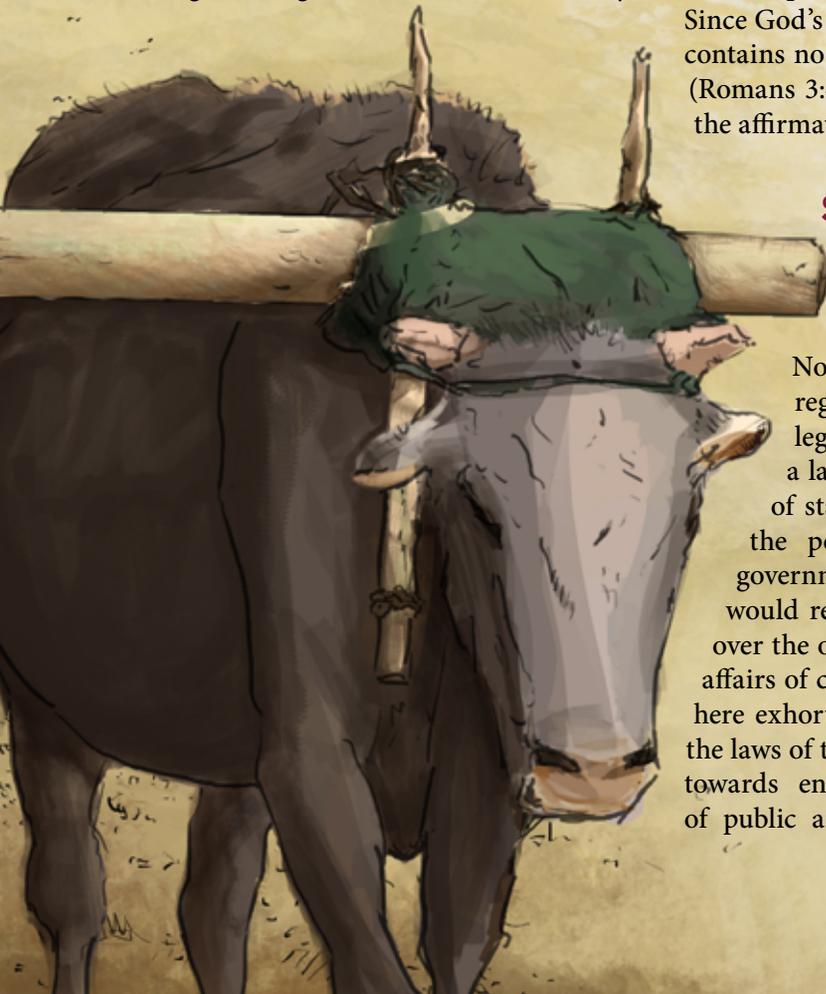
Israel of the Old Testament, as a nation specially chosen of God and unto whom “were committed the oracles of God” (Romans 3:2), had been one “great” light shining in a dark world. But when Israel as a proud, misguided, bigoted nation rejected her Messiah and subsequently persecuted the churches of Christ, that light was all but extinguished. Instead, down through the centuries of church history, communities of born-again Christians have appeared (through the regenerative work of the Holy

Spirit) in the Gentile world, acting, as it were, as many “small” lights now shining in the same dark world (cf. Acts 1:8).

As God's witness in a world that is dying in sin, God's requirement for Christians is holiness, i.e. “separateness” from the world (1 Peter 1:15-16). We are not to be conformed to this world, but to swim against the tide of this corrupt world and stand out against the ungodly philosophies and lifestyles that it espouses. Yet, just as Peter writes to Christians in Asia Minor, we as “the people of God” are to “submit... to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him [God]... For so is the will of God” (1 Peter 2:13-15). At first glance, this may seem to be a contradictory injunction. Is this submissive attitude towards such secular authorities like “kings” and “governors” compatible with scriptural nonconformity to the world? Since God's Word is self-authenticating and contains no errors, let alone contradictions (Romans 3:4a), the answer, of course, is in the affirmative!

Scriptural Attitude towards Secular Authorities

Now, the word “ordinance” means regulation or decree laid down by legislation. The “king”, as ruler of a land, represents a country's head of state; whereas “governors”, being the political leaders, represent the government of the day. Together, these would refer to all who are in authority over the ordinary people, ruling over the affairs of civil society. The apostle Peter is here exhorting Christians to comply with the laws of the land. This will go a long way towards ensuring the proper regulation of public affairs and orderly functioning



of society (which itself is made up of individuals from different walks of life, of all persuasions, and who, Scripture bluntly says, are born with an innate depravity). That being so, civil government is something God approves and not to be shunned. Loyalty to Christ's reign and submission to civil government are not at variance with each other; in fact, the latter will be deemed as done unto the Lord, who Himself is a God of holiness, as well as order (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:40).

There are 3 vital aspects we must be clear about to help us understand why God has ordained civil government and commanded our submission to its authority. We shall first consider the scriptural mandate for civil government, then examine the need for the church to be separate from the state, and finally recognise the proper response to civil government (whether benign or hostile).

Biblical Mandate for Civil Government

Human society is a society of fallen beings who (being made in the image of God) nevertheless have morality imprinted in them, which makes them conscience-driven. Having an ethical code inbuilt in them, men are very different from animals in that they can discern moral right and wrong. But this conscience, having been corrupted or darkened in fallen man, can be wilfully suppressed by sinful men in their ill-intent to live a self-indulgent life without any restraint or accountability to God. If left unchecked, society can easily degenerate into a state of anarchy where everyone is a law unto himself. History is documented with such tragic stories, that when "there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). The most graphic manifestation of this lawless state was seen in the antediluvian world, which evidently had no system of police or judges –

and so no civil government – to restrain the wicked expressions of "every imagination of the thoughts of (man's) heart (which) was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). The result: "the earth was filled with violence" (Genesis 6:11), necessitating the wiping out of the entire antediluvian population (with the exception of Noah and his family in the Ark) in a worldwide Flood (Genesis 6:17-18)!

After the Flood, God gave the command, through Noah, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed" (Genesis 9:6). This gives the basic provision for human government among men. This is, in essence, a command to establish a formal system of human government whereby justice is carried out, especially in the case of murder. Evidently, there was no formal judicial or policing system before the Flood; relying merely on man's depraved conscience was not sufficient for mankind to live in harmony, as demonstrated by the corruption and violence that grew steadily throughout the 1,656 years of that pre-Flood world. When God instituted the death penalty for murder after the Flood, He delegated to people the authority to organise themselves to put to death the culprit. The authority for capital punishment also implies the authority to establish laws governing human relationships and interactions for peaceful and harmonious co-existence. So, this simple instruction to Noah is the fundamental basis and, therefore, biblical mandate for mankind to assume responsibility for civil government, exercised under God.

Undeniably, wherever people groups reside and work in a shared domain, say, a province, state or country, they have to live and relate to one another, especially so if they are great in number. Rules (and even laws) are needed to regulate their lives and interactions, in order to minimize conflicts or friction that may arise, as well as

administer justice and uphold fairness. The rule of law serves as a restraint on men's sins against their fellow men and is indispensable in maintaining strong social mores in a country. By way of illustration, we who live under the just rule of a good government in Singapore have been enjoying great social peace, which further makes it conducive to the propagation and "free course" of the Gospel. By God's grace, we have been spared the tumult of social unrest brought about by civil disobedience, as could be witnessed in many political flashpoints around the world. No wonder Paul exhorts us to pray for those in authority over us (1 Timothy 2:1-2a) – that they may rule well, of course. Indeed, without the rule of law and its enforcement by civil government, there can be no order in the land!

Separation of Ecclesiastical Rule from Civil Government

By instructing Christians to submit to kings and governors, as unto God's "agents" for rewarding law-abiders and punishing evildoers (1 Peter 2:13-14), the Bible clearly intimates the separation of church from the state. No Christian (and for that matter, no church) is above the law. "For rulers (i.e. the secular authorities in the land)... beareth not the sword in vain... (as) the minister(s) of God... to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil" (Romans 13:3-4). In other words, civil government in general, and magistrates in particular, are necessary to maintain public peace and uphold justice in the land, "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (1 Timothy 2:2b).

This unfortunately was far from the case during the Medieval Ages in Europe, which saw the rise and political dominance of the Roman Catholic church. This rise in ecclesiastical power had its beginning when Constantine, the then Roman emperor,

linked the church with the state. He favoured Christianity due to his superstitious "attributing" of his victory over his rivals to the God of Christianity. Not only was there freedom of worship, there was even the establishment of clergy, which became highly respectable. Many, who had neither calling nor commitment, craved to join the clergy purely for the prestige and good life that came with all the trappings of high office. Over time, pride and ambition took root and festered in the church hierarchy, and the Roman Catholic church became an influential and authoritative institution in medieval Europe, wielding great political clout. Throughout much of that period, there were power struggles and open conflict between the church and the state. This is in direct opposition to the scriptural command to submit to, and thus not interfere with, civil authorities!

This unabashed mixing of religion with politics weakened the church spiritually. While medieval popes built up great power and increasingly involved themselves in political affairs of the state, the church conversely grew weaker in its spiritual domain, as spiritual duties were neglected and spiritual goals supplanted by political expedience. Wickedness in church leadership, gross immorality in the church, together with sordid stories of nepotism, drunkenness and neglect of the flock by the priests, were the inevitable evils spawned by a corrupt, extravagant papacy. In fact, at the height of the papacy's rule over Europe in the 12th and 13th centuries, even kings and rulers were under the pope's control, as they feared being excommunicated and thereby losing their "salvation". To add insult to injury, conscientious Christians who opposed erroneous church teachings were dealt with harshly by the Roman Catholic leaders. Many had their properties confiscated, were imprisoned or even tortured to death, without recourse to a

fair hearing by civil authorities, which were all under the absolute control of the pope. Truly, “power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” No wonder the medieval period coincided with the so-called “Dark Ages” of Christianity!

In truth, the church is not supposed to rule over political dominions. The church has not the same power as the civil magistrate to use “the power of the sword” to inflict punishment or coerce compliance, as no such mandate is given to the church, which is a distinctly spiritual entity, not a civil entity. In fact, Christ has categorically delineated that the leaders of the church are not given to exercise dominion the way “the princes of the Gentiles” do over the people (Matthew 20:25-26). It is abundantly clear that ecclesiastical authority is not to be confused with civil authority. All Christians, like all citizens, are to submit to the laws of the government in whichever country they live and work. Disregarding the need for non-interference of the church in state affairs not only contravenes the biblical injunction in 1 Peter 2:13-15, but is also a sure path down the slippery slope

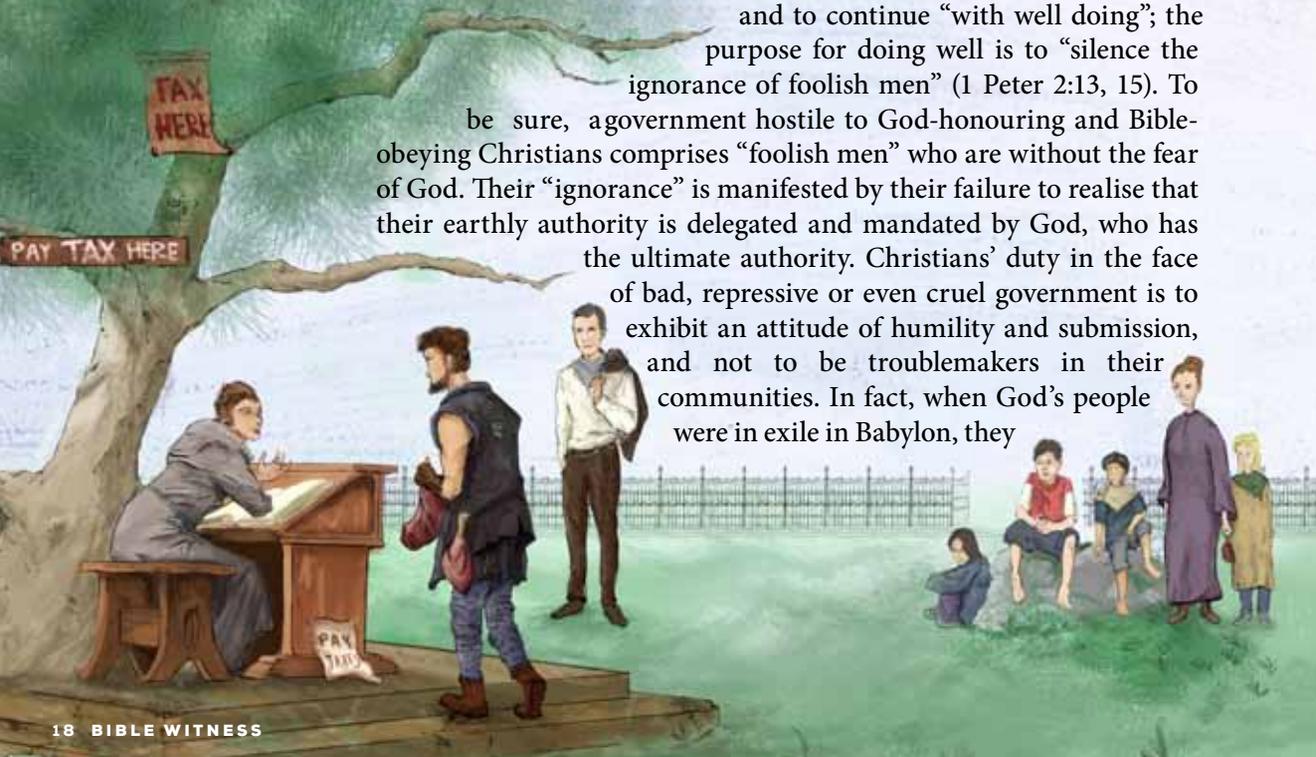
towards ecclesiastical corruption and spiritual declension!

Proper Response to Civil Government

Having realized the biblical mandate for civil government and the biblical need for ecclesiastical rule to be separate from civil authority, it clearly follows that “be subject unto the higher powers” is the biblical way to go. “For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God” (Romans 13:1). The Bible makes it clear that Christians should respond to and respect governmental authority as we do to God’s authority. It makes no difference whether the human authority in power is righteous or oppressive. Admittedly, this submissiveness to civil government is rather straightforward in the case of good and just rulers and laws. But what happens “when the wicked beareth rule”? Or when the government lays down a civil law which clearly goes against God’s Law?

Peter unambivalently states that it is still God’s will for God’s people to “submit... to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake” and to continue “with well doing”; the purpose for doing well is to “silence the ignorance of foolish men” (1 Peter 2:13, 15). To

be sure, a government hostile to God-honouring and Bible-obeying Christians comprises “foolish men” who are without the fear of God. Their “ignorance” is manifested by their failure to realise that their earthly authority is delegated and mandated by God, who has the ultimate authority. Christians’ duty in the face of bad, repressive or even cruel government is to exhibit an attitude of humility and submission, and not to be troublemakers in their communities. In fact, when God’s people were in exile in Babylon, they



were to “seek the peace of the city whither... (they had been) carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall (they) have peace” (Jeremiah 29:7). However, if obeying the government involves the clear, direct violation of God’s Law, then we are to “obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29b). If, in doing so, we suffer punishment from the authorities, we are to take it patiently and rejoice at being “counted worthy to suffer shame for his name” (Acts 5:41b). For it is “thankworthy” and “acceptable with God” to endure grief and suffer wrongfully for well doing (1 Peter 2:19-20).

Consider some instructive biblical examples of responses to hostile governments. While sojourning in Egypt, the Hebrews, who had “increased abundantly, and multiplied” (Exodus 1:7), were made to work as slaves with taskmasters set over them. Being “exceeding mighty” (in number, that is), they would have constituted a large labour force for the Egyptians. When Moses (raised of God) appeared on the scene to bring them out of Egyptian bondage, he did not call the people to rebel and go on “strike”, or stage mass demonstrations or sit-in protests. God’s people apparently continued working and did not leave until the cruel and capricious Pharaoh let them go (Exodus 12:31-32). Moses waited for God to work on His people’s behalf in a mighty way. Though they were unjustly afflicted by the spiteful Pharaoh’s taskmasters, they submitted to and bore their wrongful sufferings. When God finally vindicated them through His miraculous deliverance, the “ignorance” of the “foolish” Egyptians was literally “put to silence”!

Similarly, when Daniel’s 3 friends were pressured into falling down and worshipping the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar’s golden image in violation of God’s Ten Commandments, they stood firm. They would rather disobey this

particular command of the heathen king than to offend the King of kings. Yet they were respectful throughout. Knowing what was at stake, they willingly submitted to the king’s punishment (Daniel 3:16-21). Even Daniel, when he was “trapped” by the jealous government officials into choosing between disregarding the Median king Darius’ decree or “the law of his God” (Daniel 6:5b), knew he had only one option. He continued praying thrice daily, facing Jerusalem through the open windows in his chamber, “as he did aforesaid” (Daniel 6:10). He was willing to bear the brunt of the irreversible “law of the Medes and Persians” (Daniel 6:12b). He did not kick up a fuss, trying to get himself off the hook. Neither did he resist being led to the lions’ den. He accepted the undeserved punishment submissively. In a word, Daniel and his 3 friends were happy to suffer for righteousness’ sake!

Truly, such biblical responses to hostile government tally with Peter’s reiteration that “if ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their [the authorities’] terror, neither be troubled” (1 Peter 3:14). Christians must be law-abiding and respectful of government authorities. But if compliance with government regulation runs counter to God’s Law, loyalty to God’s Word takes precedence. We must then be willing to make a stand and “suffer as a Christian” (1 Peter 4:16), not as a rowdy troublemaker or an evildoer. For so is the will of God, that with such well doing, those “foolish” perpetrators of Christians’ wrongful sufferings would be dumbfounded and put to shame. On the other hand, Christians, though they have to suffer for well doing, will “not be ashamed” nor be “put to silence”. Through their submissive response in bearing reproach for the name of Christ, God will be glorified on this behalf. Amen.

It is God's Will that We Must Be Well Doers

PRABHUDAS KOSHY

The apostle Peter takes pain to remind every Christian “that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God” (1 Peter 4:2). If a Christian does not yield himself to live according to the will of God, his life will be marred by the lust of the flesh. The will of God, which is contrary to the lust of the flesh, is the Christian’s best protection against the lusts which war against his soul (cf. 1 Peter 2:11). So, one of the chief concerns of the apostle Peter is that Christians ought to be doers of God’s will. To emphasise his point, Peter repeatedly affirms (three times, in fact) in his first epistle that it is God’s will that Christians be characterised as well doers (cf. 2:15; 3:17; 4:19).

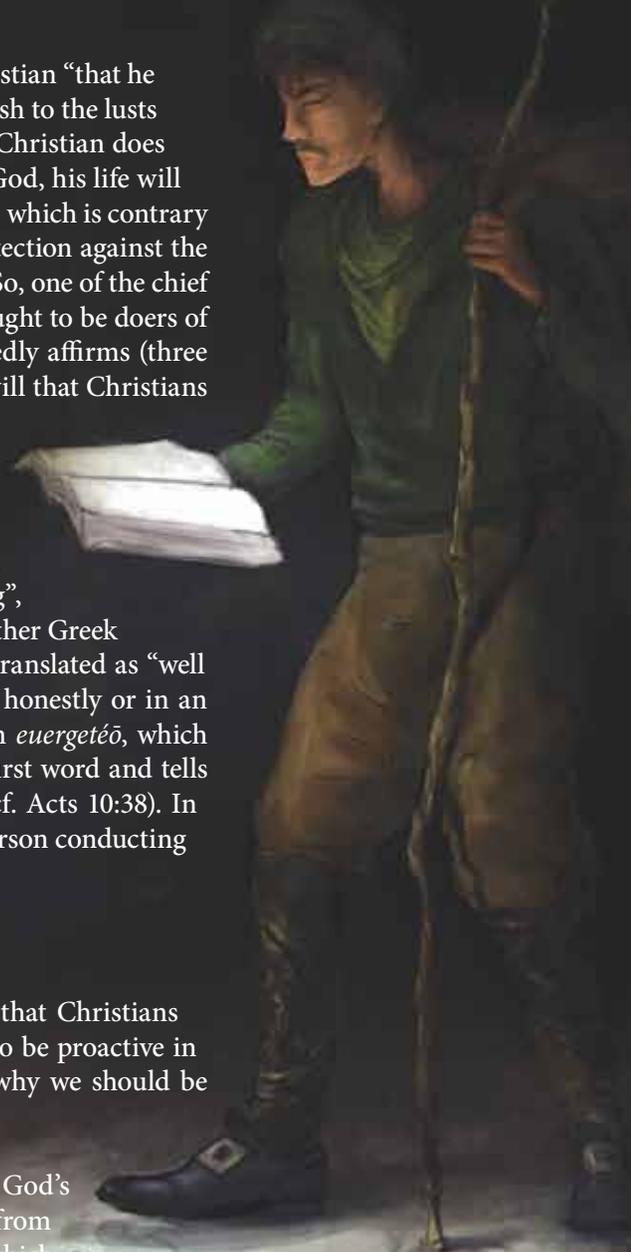
Explanation of “Well Doing”

The Greek verb *agathopoiēō* and its noun form, used by Peter three times to indicate “well doing”, refer to doing good for the benefit of others. Another Greek word *kalopoiēō*, which is used by Paul and also translated as “well doing” (cf. 2 Thessalonians 3:13), denotes acting honestly or in an upright and responsible way. A third Greek term *euergetēō*, which is used in the New Testament, is similar to the first word and tells of doing good to others or conferring benefits (cf. Acts 10:38). In short, the general idea of well doing portrays a person conducting himself in an upright and beneficial manner.

Exigency of “Well Doing”

It is an oft-repeated instruction in God’s Word that Christians ought to be well doers. Christians are expected to be proactive in well doing. Several reasons are put forth as to why we should be earnest about “well doing”.

It is an indisputable teaching of God’s Word that God’s will concerning those whom He has redeemed from their sins is that they will abound in good works which



God has ordained for them to accomplish. The apostle Paul reminded Christians that “we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10; cf. Colossians 1:10). Again, Paul declared in Titus 2:14 that Christ “gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” So it is vital that “they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works” (Titus 3:8). Paul further reminds Christians: “But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing” (2 Thessalonians 3:13; cf. Galatians 6:9). While Christians are not to be busybodies, they are to be like busy bees, always dedicated to carry out God’s will, which is “good, and acceptable, and perfect” (Romans 12:2b). Idleness and indifference cannot be part of the Christians’ nature. They must always be industrious in fulfilling the will of God. When it comes to well doing, Christians must be highly enthusiastic and earnest, cheerful and generous, thoughtful and sacrificial.

Admittedly, there can be many challenges and obstacles that would discourage and drain those who busy themselves in well doing. “Unreasonable and wicked men” (2 Thessalonians 3:2), as well as “some which walk among you disorderly... (and) are busybodies” (2 Thessalonians 3:11) in the church, can encumber those who are engaged in diligent service. Besides, tiredness and personal struggles can also cause Christians to shun difficulties and crave for ease and rest. So it is paramount that Christians guard against weariness that would prevent them from maintaining good works.

Even in the midst of affliction, opposition and persecution, Christians must endure them all to be well doers, as admonished by the apostle Peter: “For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing” (1 Peter 3:17). In the

advancement of God’s truth, righteousness and benevolence, Christians must be prepared to cope with all kinds of suffering allowed by God’s providence. Christians are not called to suffer as evildoers, but as well doers. They should not be surprised that they are afflicted even though they have acted righteously and charitably. If well doing is their main desire and purpose in life, they will brace themselves for all kinds of problems and sufferings.

To those who suffer as well doers, Peter says, “Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator” (1 Peter 4:19). All who persevere in well doing, even in the face of suffering, have the assurance that God the faithful Creator will preserve their souls. God’s will for Christians is that they will “by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life” (Romans 2:7). Those who have repented of their sins and trusted in Christ will not live like the unrepentant men again. Rather, they will patiently maintain their lives for the glory and honour of their most holy God, trusting always in His love and care for them. They will gladly embrace Jesus’ exhortation to “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

Encouragement for “Well Doing”

The Almighty God, whose will is that Christians ought to be well doers, has also promised His unceasing help to enable them to fulfil every good work which He has ordained them to do. In 2 Corinthians 9:8, Christians are reminded that “God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work”. God will furnish Christians with all the means

necessary to liberally give of themselves, so that they will abound more and more in their good works.

Furthermore, God is able to “make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen” (Hebrews 13:21). Hence, Christians who yield themselves to well doing should expect God’s abundant blessings for them to accomplish all of God’s good and perfect will concerning them. To this end, Scripture has this added encouragement: “And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you” (1 Thessalonians 3:12).

Examples of “Well Doing”

The supreme example of fulfilling God’s will by doing good works is seen in none other than our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Jesus did innumerable acts of kindness and miracles of benevolence, such as healing the sick and feeding the hungry. His miracles were good works, as they ministered to the well-being of the people who are in need and suffering. Peter, who had personally witnessed much of Christ’s miraculous deeds of compassion and mercy, further affirmed this fact: “How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him” (Acts 10:38). The kind of good which Christ had dispensed was wondrously beneficial to the souls and bodies of those who came to Him. Christ’s works of compassion had been carried out with great diligence and unwearied patience. Yet He had to contend with a group of hateful, murderous Jews, to whom He issued this challenging query: “Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me?” (John 10:32).

It is written of Christ that He “for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame” (Hebrews 12:2). He was least concerned about his own personal comfort and welfare. While He lived on this earth, He endured all sorts of hardships without soliciting help from others. As the Gospel-writers have testified, “the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45). His mind was wholly set on doing good to others and blessing them. His doctrine has always been “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

Another example of well doing can be gleaned from a lady disciple of Jesus, Tabitha, who was specially mentioned in the Bible for her good works. It is written of her in Acts 9:36 – “Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did.” She helped and cheered many widows by making coats and garments for them. She used her God-given abilities for the purpose of helping the poor and needy. Tabitha not only did good works, but was also “full” of them, implying that her heart was dedicated to do God’s will concerning her. Her discipleship was expressed in deeds of benevolence. Tabitha, who was a “disciple” of Christ, truly emulated her Master’s goodness in showing sympathy and love.

It is the duty of every Christian not only to do good works, but also to encourage other Christians towards manifesting good works. In Hebrews 10:24, Christians are exhorted to “consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works”. Clearly, the divine counsel is that Christians ought always to be ready channels of good works, as well as a decided influence for well doing.

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so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity:
for God loveth a cheerful giver”
2 Corinthians 9:7*



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Holy Land Bible Study Tour (1st – 10th Dec 2014)

Silent Witness of the Stones

WAI MUN AND JOLYNE CHO

“And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out” (Luke 19:40).

Indeed, the stones did ‘cry out’ unto us, like witnesses, when we visited the Holy Land from 1st to 10th Dec 2014. There were stones galore at the southern part of the Holy Land. No wonder stones featured prominently throughout the Bible. In Bethel, Jacob used them as his pillows to sleep (Genesis 28:11), whereupon he dreamt of the ladder reaching to heaven and heard God promising to give him the land. Throughout the Old Testament, stones were heaped together to bear witness to commemorate important events (Genesis 31:46; Joshua 4:7; 1 Samuel 7:12). Furthermore, those who are “biblically instructed” were also grimly reminded that stoning to death was a way of punishment. The land was dry and thirsty, full of stones and difficult to tread upon. In that kind of environment, we armed ourselves with hats/caps/umbrellas, shoes with good grip and kept drinking to hydrate ourselves. If we had been travelling with Moses then, wearing robes and sandals, having no food or drink

in that dry, stony terrain, we would for sure have murmured and complained like the Israelites over food and creature comforts. Really, the stones literally cried out against us as we pondered over what the Israelites had to go through and how we could have easily sinned like them!

The Bible says there is “a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together” (Ecclesiastes 3:5). The building of the great temple and the destruction of it, the building of strong cities and the destruction and ruins of them, cry out to us too. While we admired the magnificent remains of Jerash and Capernaum, and the intricate carvings on each piece of the remains, fear and awe of God struck us because these are reminders and evidence that He alone has the power to set up and put down “whom he would” (Daniel 5:19; Matthew 11:23). The stones are warning us – which side are we on? Better be safe – choose the LORD’s side!

Thank God for making us “as lively stones, ...built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices” through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:5).

This is an apt description of our group when we worshipped and prayed together, edified and took care of one another. Love, unity and patience were displayed abundantly throughout the trip. We, like little children, curiously explored the sights, sounds and smells of the Land of the Bible, and learnt geography together. Every difficulty was conquered by faith and love the Christian way, no less. We have enjoyed the trip very much, and this sentiment was shared by many others, including those who have travelled to the Holy Land several times before.

This trip has created new meanings for us when we now read the Bible. We pray that we shall be steadfast and unmoveable in our faith, lest we should be a “castaway” (1 Corinthians 9:27b). We pray that we can be “lively stones”, to be a good testimony for our Lord Jesus Christ. ■

Journey of Faith

JENNY LOK

The year 2014 ended in a very special way for me – an unexpected opportunity to participate in the Holy Land Bible Study Tour to Jordan and Israel, organised by the Bible Witness Media Ministry of Gethsemane B-P Church, Singapore. Pastor Prabhudas Koshy led our team of 48 participants.

As the psalmist said in Psalm 103:1-2, “Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits”, so my heart is moved to give thanks to God for His provisions and spiritual blessings which I have received through this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to visit the land of God’s covenantal people. Truly, never in my wildest dreams have I ever entertained the thought that I could someday actually step foot on the Bible lands of Jordan and Israel!

One thing’s for sure, I did have a great time visiting the various biblical sites. Precious are those sublime moments in Jordan – beholding the spectacular beauty of Petra, one of the new seven wonders of the world; standing in awe of God’s greatness atop Mt Nebo where Moses once stood to catch a glimpse of the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 32:48-52); and looking on in amazement before River Jordan (which narrowly separates Jordan and Israel), picturing the dramatic way in which Elijah was taken up by a whirlwind to heaven (2 Kings 2). Equally instructive sights in Israel include: visiting Jericho which brought to mind the well-known battle fought by God’s children in ancient times as recorded in Joshua 6; walking along the streets of old Jerusalem and visiting the Nazareth village, which evoked memories of what I have read of the life of the people in Jesus’ time; rejoicing on Mt of Olives from which Jesus

ascended to heaven (Acts 1:9-12) and to which He will return (Acts 1:11; Zechariah 14:4); and the list goes on.

Be that as it may, this alone does not make the Holy Land Bible Study Tour special for me. What really matters are the spiritual blessings and lessons I have gained through this trip. To begin with, God blesses me with a greater desire to read His Word more intently in order to fully appreciate the historical, geographical and cultural contexts of many major events and the lives of the saints of old, both in the Old and New Testaments, particularly the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ among His people in time past. The trip to the many historical sites was not only an eye-opener, it also further reinforced the authenticity of the Bible in my heart as well.

Moreover, I am grateful too for the daily morning devotions conducted by Pastor Koshy. These were precious times whereby our learning of God's Word in relation to the lands of Jordan and Israel was greatly enhanced. Thank God for the many spiritual lessons taught – for instance, the need to repent of our sins daily, to count spiritual blessings more than earthly blessings, to love our spiritual heritage, the need to be devout and consecrated when we worship God, just to name a few. The devotion times had certainly helped to anchor my soul firmly in the Word of God, without which I could have lost my focus during the entire tour. That would reduce it to just a time of mere sightseeing and feasting on sumptuous Middle Eastern food.

Undoubtedly, for me, this Bible Study Tour has been a spiritual journey of greater faith and trust in our gracious God. As it was the first time that I had ever been away for so long (a period of ten days!) to foreign lands, I was rather concerned about how our children would manage without me and my

husband, Kwok Wah (who had been tasked with coordinating the tour). Though one of my sisters would be overseeing their welfare, I still had my reservations. It was during this time that God's comforting promise in Philippians 4:6-7 came to my remembrance: "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Thank God for granting me much peace and assurance as I learned to entrust Him with the welfare of our children.

Having overcome the said misgiving, I was all set to leave Singapore with Kwok Wah and the rest of the team come 1st December 2014, the day of our scheduled flight. Three days prior to the trip, however, I realized that Kwok Wah was still not able to get his visa in time to travel with the team. I was confused and could not make sense of the entire situation. Nonetheless, with Kwok Wah's encouragement, I went ahead with the team, fully expecting his visa to be approved as hoped for, and that he would at least be able to join me from the second day of the tour.

To my dismay, three days of the tour went by and still there was no news of approval of Kwok Wah's visa to Israel. During this testing and most distressing time, I thank God that He taught me how to be still before Him, to spend time in prayer, to trust in His wisdom and accept His will, even if it meant feeling lonesome without Kwok Wah's presence. I am also most thankful to the Lord for the warm fellowship of brethren, which had helped to ease the tension within me while I awaited news of the visa. Praise God too for the leadership of Pastor Koshy who ministered to Kwok Wah and me with kind and comforting words, which really helped us to keep the visa issue in its proper

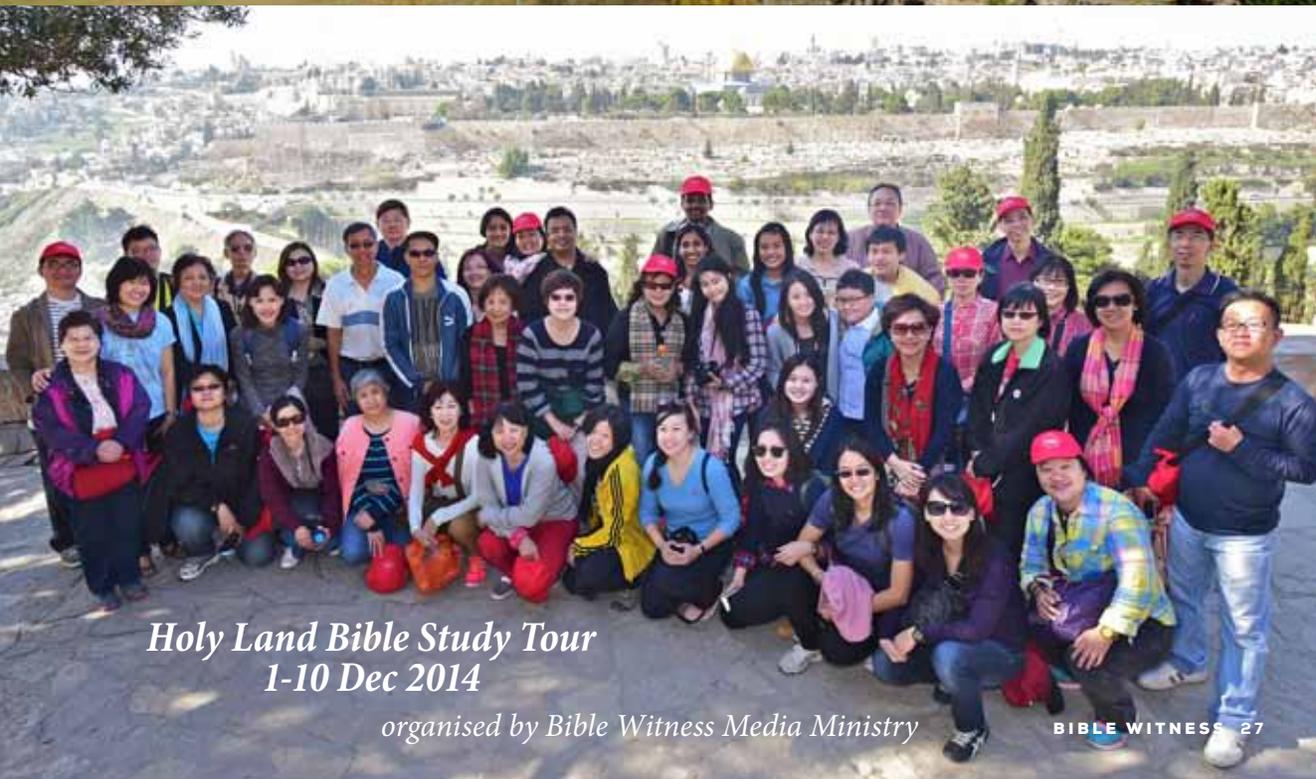
perspective. As the song goes, “God never moves without purpose or plan...” and as Romans 8:28 reminds us, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose”, so we trusted God that He would do what was best in His sight.

Well, praise God! There was a happy ending to the visa problem. Kwok Wah joined the team from 5th December onwards and gladly fulfilled his remaining responsibilities till the end of our tour. Truly, God is gracious. Indeed, undeserving as I am, I have tasted the Lord’s goodness and faithfulness throughout the Holy Land Bible Study Tour. As a team, we have also been blessed with safety, fine weather, good health and loving Christian fellowship. Praise God for His unfailing love and mercy towards His people!

Dear reader, you can likewise experience God’s goodness and loving kindness if you only trust the Lord Jesus and commit your life to Him. With the Lord’s help, you can learn to rise above life’s challenges, for the Lord is the Almighty God.

“O LORD God of hosts, who is a strong LORD like unto thee? Or to thy faithfulness round about thee? Thou rulest the raging of the sea: when the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them” (Psalm 89:8-9).

All glory and honour be unto His Name. ■



*Holy Land Bible Study Tour
1-10 Dec 2014*

organised by Bible Witness Media Ministry

Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556)

Part II

Retold by Jenny Lok Illustrated by Linus Kok

(Retold from "The New Foxe's Book of Martyrs", written by John Foxe, rewritten & updated by Harold J. Chadwick. Bridge-Logos Publishers)



For the next three years, Thomas Cranmer was treated most harshly by his Roman Catholic enemies. The more his enemies tortured and mistreated him, the more determined Cranmer was to hold fast to God's truths.

Seeing that Cranmer was not unduly affected by cruel treatment, his enemies cunningly devised a different way to deal

with him. They removed him from prison and put him in the house of a high-ranking priest, where he was free to enjoy every kind of pleasure

he desired. What a complete change of environment from his previous harsh imprisonment! Alas, he was thrown off his guard. Chains and threats could not bring Cranmer to bow to his enemies but this seemingly kind treatment made it so easy for him to forget himself and give in to temptations.





Certainly, Satan had a tight grip on Thomas Cranmer at such a time. Cranmer began to dream of being reinstated in his office as archbishop and enjoying once again his former grandeur. Needless to say, he was hoping that he could save his own life. All these would not be possible unless he recanted, that is, to tell his enemies that he no longer believe in God's truths which he had held so dear. Slowly but surely, his enemies deceived him into signing a total of 6 documents, starting with a general one and progressively leading him on to deny God and the Bible truths. The moment Cranmer signed the last document, the Roman Catholics were jubilant but the Protestants wept in sorrow. Who could be happier than Queen Mary herself? It was said that "she would have Cranmer a Catholic or no Cranmer at all". Indeed, how bent on revenge she was!

As the days went by, Cranmer was seized with an increasingly guilty conscience. His guilt weighed upon him to the point that he could no longer bear it. Deep down, he knew his end was near.

As Cranmer had expected, the day of his burning came. In the early morning of 21 March, 1556, Cranmer was brought to St Mary's Church. The sight of him in torn and dirty clothes made many onlookers sorrowful indeed. Everyone present was waiting eagerly to hear Cranmer's reasons for leaving his Protestant faith. Amidst the jeering of the Roman Catholics and the loud sobs of the Protestants, Cranmer was led to a low, shabby stage placed opposite the pulpit. Thomas Cranmer knelt down, turned his face towards heaven and silently prayed in earnest to God. A sermon was preached by a certain Dr Pole. Then Cranmer was ordered to profess his Catholic faith to all who were present.

Before Cranmer spoke, he prayed with much anguish in his heart and pleaded for God's mercy. Memories of his awful sins – his love for glamour and power, and his subsequent denial of God's truths – pained him so terribly that Cranmer broke down and wept bitterly. With a heart full of repentance, he would repeatedly look upward

towards heaven, raising his hands and letting them fall heavily to his sides. A great sense of unworthiness filled his entire being. It was in this state of sorrow and shame that Cranmer spoke to the waiting crowd.

Contrary to what his enemies had expected, Cranmer delivered a most moving speech, affirming his faith in God and His Son Jesus Christ. Imagine his enemies' anger and disbelief! With this public confession of his faith in God and His Holy Word, Cranmer dealt a final blow to his enemies' deception. At the end, among other things, he had this to say:



“And inasmuch as my hand has offended and written contrary to my heart, my hand shall first be punished – for when I come to the fire it shall first be burned.”

True to his words, when he was brought to the fire, Cranmer unflinchingly held out his right arm and let it burn until it became as black as coal. While his hand was burning, often he would exclaim, “This unworthy right hand!” This he repeated till the flames engulfed him, and he was gloriously received unto his eternal home in heaven.

Certainly, Thomas Cranmer had not died in vain, for in losing his life, he had gained everlasting joy in the wonderful presence of our loving Saviour Jesus Christ. “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 16:25). Above all, God’s Word was held high on that very day!

Like Thomas Cranmer, a great reformer, would you also love the Lord and His Word more than anything else in this world- even your very life? Remember, dear children, in obeying God, you will one day receive your glorious eternal reward in heaven.

BIBLE TRIVIA - EXODUS 21 & 22

SARAH YONG

After giving the Ten Commandments, the Lord explained the laws and ordinances which the children of Israel were to observe. They are a standard set by God for His children to follow so that we may live godly and victorious Christian lives.

A) Use the helping words below to complete each sentence.

1. God revealed His _____ to Moses to set before the people (21:1).
2. A man that smiteth his father or mother will be put to _____ (21:15).
3. Men who _____ and hurt others will be punished (21:22).
4. A man must _____ more than what he stole (22:1).
5. Matters of _____ will be heard before judges (22:9).
6. They were not to oppress a _____ (22:21).
7. They should not _____ the widow or the fatherless child (22:22).
8. What a man has pledged, he must _____ (22:26).
9. The LORD will hear the cry of His people, for He is _____ (22:27).
10. They were to give the _____ of their sons unto the LORD (22:29).

B) Next, locate the answers in the Word Search below. The words can read horizontally, vertically or diagonally, as well as upwards or downwards. (Hint: the first letter of each word is in bold.)

R S A N C **T** T **A** E S I F Y Y O
 E U R S E R **F** L F L E V E S T
 G H E R E E F I O F P G R E S
 N H A N D S B E R Y L O D S E
 A **D** E H O P L Y F S H I E U O
 R E R A I A **G** A M T T L C P J
 T L T R R S H R A E R B L T O
S I R E D S Y E A E E O O U R
 G V O H D B **D** L H C V E V R I
R E S T O R E T T I I C U S N
 R R A O P W A V Z V R O V E G
 I W T M Y F H A M G T D U M T
 E X **J** U D G M E N T **S** I Z S E

AFFLICT
 DEATH
 DELIVER
 FIRSTBORN
 GRACIOUS
 JUDGMENTS
 RESTORE
 STRANGER
 STRIVE
 TRESPASS

ANSWERS TO BIBLE TRIVIA - EXODUS 20 (VOL 14, ISSUE 4, PP. 30-31)

- a. in the Lord b. created man in his own image
 c. be ye holy in all manner of conversation d. let him labour ; he may have to give
 e. put on the new man ; renewed in knowledge. f. godliness with contentment is great gain



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Our Sonship**

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Pastor Prabhudas Koshy

Venue

Thistle Johor Bahru

Date

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