

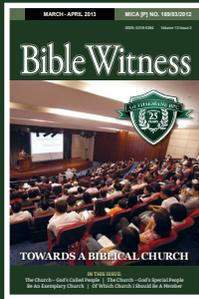
Bible Witness



TOWARDS A BIBLICAL CHURCH

IN THIS ISSUE:

The Church – God’s Called People | The Church – God’s Special People
Be An Exemplary Church | Of Which Church I Should Be A Member



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About the cover photo

The congregation of Gethsemane B-P Church listening to the preaching of the Word during the Lord’s Day worship service on 3 March 2013, 25 years from the day of inauguration of the church.

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editorial

Prabhudas Koshy



The Bible Witness Media Ministry (BWMM), a ministry of Gethsemane B-P Church, is thankful to the Lord for enabling us to publish this issue in conjunction with the Silver Jubilee Thanksgiving Service of our church. Therefore, it gives me and my co-labourers in BWMM great joy and excitement to present this issue as a token of our thanksgiving to God for nurturing and empowering Gethsemane B-P Church to be an effective witness of Jesus Christ to the world.

The articles in this issue are a collection of pastoral exhortations on the nature and function of a biblical church published in Gethsemane B-P Church's weekly bulletins over a span of more than 20 years. We pray that the contents of this issue will be edifying to Christians everywhere and also to churches that seek to be biblical in its ministries.

As the Editor of Bible Witness and Pastor of Gethsemane Bible-Presbyterian Church, my heart is overwhelmed with gratitude for the grace that God has given to me, a worthless sinner, to serve in both ministries. I am a debtor to my Lord for His immense grace, which I have received. As much as Paul has confessed, I, too, with all sincerity say, "Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 3:7-9).

Below is my thanksgiving article which was published just a couple of weeks ago in the church weekly of Gethsemane B-P Church.

25 THINGS THAT I AM THANKFUL FOR ABOUT OUR CHURCH

As I set my mind to praise God for 25 years of Gethsemane B-P Church's ministry, I decided to list down 25 thanksgiving items about our church. It is important, after being part of this church for more than 20 years, that I do not forget to bless the Lord for the benefits I have received through the church. Every church member must be thankful to God for the goodness He has bestowed upon him through the church. We should not conduct ourselves like the unthankful people of ancient Israel of whom it was said, "Our fathers understood not thy wonders in Egypt; they remembered not the multitude of thy mercies; but provoked him at the sea, even at the Red sea" (Psalm 106:7).

I thank the Lord for Gethsemane Bible-Presbyterian Church's

- 1 Submission to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour and Head of the Church.
- 2 High regard for the Bible as God's inspired, infallible, inerrant, preserved and perfect Word.
- 3 Allegiance to God's Word as the sole and final authority in all matters of faith and practice.
- 4 Adherence to the Reformed, premillennial doctrines.
- 5 Consecration to biblical and godly worship.
- 6 Diligence in nurturing and maintaining biblical and godly leadership in the church.
- 7 Love for expository preaching, which is biblically thorough and clear.
- 8 Commitment to nurture the members of the church through sound biblical teaching.
- 9 Zeal to propagate sound biblical materials through modern media.
- 10 Dedication to evangelistic efforts to spread the Gospel for the salvation of sinners.
- 11 Resolve to engage in worldwide Gospel missions and church planting.
- 12 Readiness to separate from unbiblical individuals, organisations, movements and churches.
- 13 Keeness to promote holy living.
- 14 Willingness to rebuke sin and abstain from all forms of evil.

- 15 Determination to help one another through deeds of love and mercy.
- 16 Steadfastness to emulate Christ in all matters.
- 17 Fervency in communing with godly and biblically sound Christians.
- 18 Resoluteness of faith in the taking up of challenging tasks for the extension of God's kingdom.
- 19 Enthusiasm to stand up and be counted as witnesses of Christ in all areas of life and ministry.
- 20 Eagerness to be ready for the return of Christ.
- 21 Joyful and loving support in fulfilling my God-given call to be an expositor of the Word and a pastor to His flock.
- 22 Wonderful co-labourers (elders, deacons, preachers, church staff and missionaries).
- 23 Prayerful local and mission congregations; prayers offered to God by brethren in all our churches.
- 24 Fellowship extended to my dear family.
- 25 Friendly and godly atmosphere that greatly aids the upbringing and edification of my children.

Indeed, God has given me the great privilege and honour to be part of Gethsemane B-P Church. I am a part of something greater than myself, the body of Christ, a people whom God has assembled in Christ. In our church, we are one big family of God gathered from different nations, races, languages and social backgrounds. Furthermore, despite our spiritual and physical infirmities, the power and wisdom of the Spirit are manifested in glorious ways. I am also thankful that we are bound together by nothing carnal but a holy covenant ratified by the blood of Christ. What an inheritance! What a blessing! Blessed be the Lord who called and nurtured us as Gethsemane Bible-Presbyterian Church for the last 25 years!

As Paul had said to the Thessalonians, I, too, confess, "But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). ■

ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ

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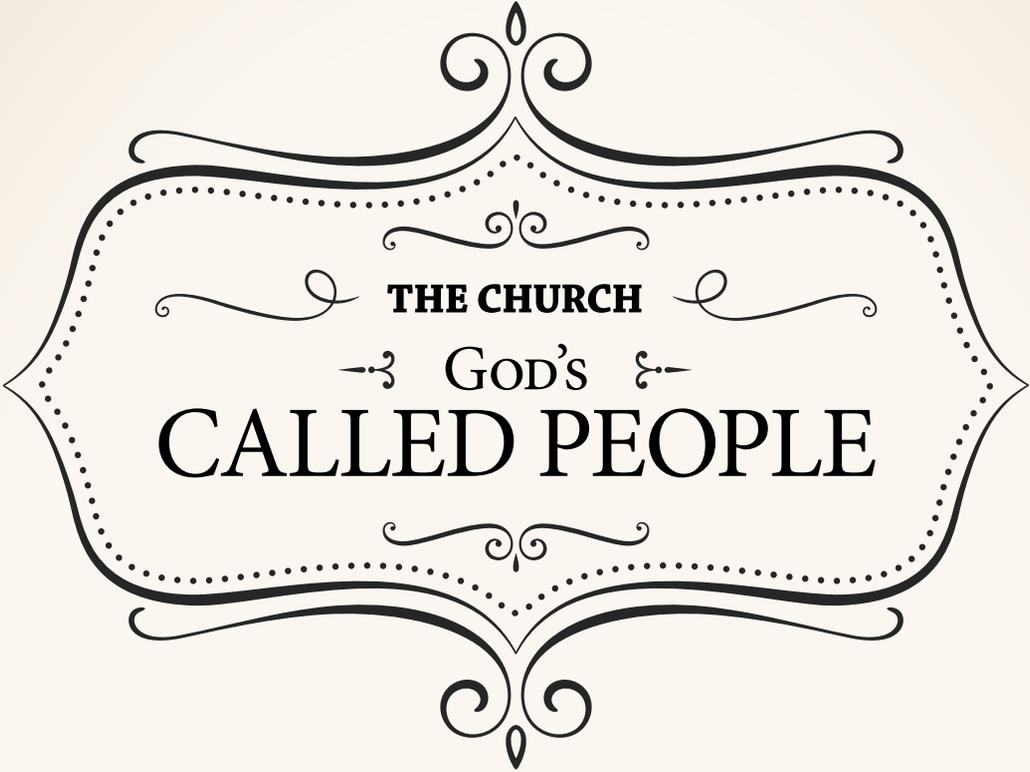
Christ Jesus,

called

to be

saints

— 1 Corinthians 1:2



THE CHURCH
 → GOD'S ←
CALLED PEOPLE

The biblical definition of “church” is that it is a group of people whom God has called and assembled as His people through Jesus Christ. This truth is best expressed by the apostle Paul when he wrote to the church in Corinth – “Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours” (1 Corinthians 1:2; cf. Romans 1:7). Paul used the word “called” three times with reference to the church in the first 9 verses of chapter 1 of First Corinthians. Everything that Paul instructed in this epistle is based on the fact that the church is a people called by God.

The success of a church’s ministry is greatly dependent on the members’ awareness of and their passionate response to the call of God. To every church that desires to be faithful and fruitful for God’s glory, understanding the call of God given to the church is paramount.

For a proper understanding of and response to the call of God given to the church, we shall consider the use of the word “called” in the New Testament with reference to the church. This will show us several specific aspects of God’s calling which all church members ought to be mindful of.

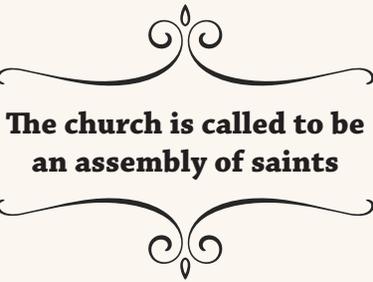


**The church is called to
belong to God**



The phrase “church of God” (1 Corinthians 1:2; cf. Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 10:32; 11:22; 15:9; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:13; and 1 Timothy 3:5) indicates that the local churches like those in Corinth belong to God. God owns the church, having purchased it for Himself with the blood of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Acts

20:28). God has made His Son, Jesus Christ, the Head of the church. Paul wrote about the church in Rome that they were “the called of Jesus Christ” (Romans 1:6). So no one should ever lord over the church. The church belongs to the Lord God, hence it is referred to as “the house of God” in 1 Timothy 3:15. It is not an institution or organisation that should be controlled and directed by human ideologies and fancies which are contrary to God’s revealed purposes in His Word.



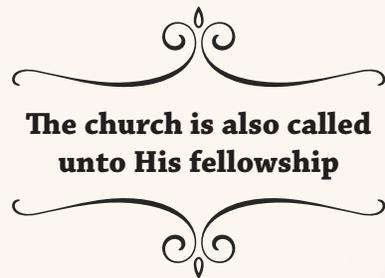
The original Greek word for “church” (*ekklesia*) literally means “called-out ones”. The church is formed by those whom God has called out of the darkness of sin and the world, to be an assembly of holy people. That is why Paul explicitly speaks of the members of the church that they “are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be saints*” (1 Corinthians 1:2b; cf. Roman 1:7).

The word “sanctified” (*hagiazō*) means “to be separated from profane things and be dedicated to God for His use”. It is in Christ that we are sanctified from sin unto God. Christ cleanses our sins by His blood and imputes His righteousness to us that we may be separated from sin unto God for His service. Scripture says, “we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Hebrews 10:10). In Ephesians 5:25-26, Paul said, “Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.”

Paul also mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1:2 about the congregation of Corinth that they were “called to be saints”. Being sanctified or separated from sin, the members of the church “are to be saints”. The calling of the church is to function as a congregation of saints. The church and its members are summoned by God to live a life of holiness in this wicked world. No organisation or group of people on earth is endowed with a holy calling, but the church and its members.

Every member of the church who lives in worldliness and sin without genuine repentance defies God’s call and corrupts His purpose for His church. So let us cease from every sin and live a holy life that pleases our blessed Master, who loved us and gave His life for our sanctification. Nothing weakens the church as much as the sin of its people. Thus, we must separate ourselves from sin and falsehood.

Scripture reminds us again in 1 Thessalonians 4:7 – “For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.” The Lord has “saved us, and called us with an holy calling” (2 Timothy 1:9). So let us walk in holiness, in obedience to the calling we have received from the Lord.



As much as the church of God is called to be saints, it is also “called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:9). Likewise, the apostle John wrote: “truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3).

Our fellowship (or partnership) with Christ, the Son of God, must determine every fellowship we have with people or organisations. Our fellowship within the church must also be based upon Christ. In other words, we should not enter into a relationship or fellowship that would dishonour or hinder our fellowship with the Son of God. John warned us: "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth" (1 John 1:6). Paul also reminded us in Ephesians 5:10-11, "Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."

May every church member examine himself to see whether his fellowship with Christ is growing more affectionate and profound, or whether it is hindered by sins and worldly friendships and activities. The effectiveness of a church is very much dependent on the strength of its members' fellowship with Christ. If church members abide in Christ, the church will be a fruitful one. The stronger its relationship with Christ, the greater is the impact of the church as a witness to the world!



**The church is called to be
one united people**



In 1 Corinthians 1:24, we read: "But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." God has called both Jews and Greeks alike that they may have Christ as their power and wisdom. In the church, everyone, regardless

of ethnic or national diversity, has the same spiritual inheritance. In Christ, every man, whether Jew or Greek, is called to partake of the divine provision of power and wisdom.

All believers share in the same spiritual inheritance. Therefore, there is no reason why any true believer should feel that he is less privileged or more privileged than others. We are all joint-heirs with Christ. In Romans 8:17, Paul wrote: "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." Let us therefore regard one another in the church with mutual respect and love. Let us not despise but esteem one another, and thus keep our unity in Christ for God's glory.

In 1 Corinthians 7:17-24, Paul dealt with members of the church who were from different classes of society, and taught them how they should live as Christians though God's providential appointments of them in society vary. He wrote: "But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches. Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God. Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called. Art thou called being a servant? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather. For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant. Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men. Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God" (1 Corinthians 7:17- 24).

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The principle that Paul laid down was this: even though Christians are all one in Christ, each believer should remain in the same calling which the Lord has providentially allotted to him. Jewish believers should not try to become Gentiles (by erasing the physical mark of the covenant), and Gentiles should not try to become Jews (by being circumcised).

A Christian's past religious, racial or social background and his present vocation are of little consequence in his spiritual relationship with Christ. If the vocational status of a Christian can improve, well and good; if it does not, it is not a matter of concern. What matters is that every Christian should realize that he is Christ's slave and needs to render obedience to Him. Every vocation then becomes Christian service performed for the Master (Ephesians 6:5-8). A Christian can then live in peace (1 Corinthians 7:15b) in his calling to whatever earthly vocation, and carry it out as one responsible to God.

In the church, members must hold one another in high esteem (Philippians 2:3; cf. Romans 12:10). No church can prosper if it is not united by mutual love and respect. Selfishness and pride will ruin the church, but a sacrificial spirit and humility will promote its unity and strength. So may all church members take heed of Paul's advice in Ephesians 4:3-4 – "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling." Paul also reminded us, "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful" (Colossians 3:15). ■





THE CHURCH GOD'S SPECIAL PEOPLE



“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.”

1 Peter 2:9-10

The first readers of the above words of Peter were persecuted Christians. They were a rejected people in this world. They were treated like strangers in their own countries. This experience can be ours too. Some of us may be experiencing loneliness and hostility because of our loyalty to our Lord. We may also be often treated like an unnecessary burden.

However, Peter reminds all Christians who suffer loneliness and hostility that they are a special people to God. No matter how unfair and gruesome the way the world treats Christians, they should remember how special they are in God's eyes.

Christians who know the spiritual status God has bestowed on them must live up to that special privilege. When believers in a local church strive diligently to fulfil their special calling, the church will become a wonderful place for every believer, especially for those who are affected by the hostility of the world. Thus a local church can become a place of comfort, fellowship and edification to all genuine believers.

Peter's description of the New Testament church parallels God's description of the nation of Israel in Exodus 19:5-6 and Deuteronomy 7:6. When the nation of Israel had gone rebellious and disobedient, God called the New Testament church to enjoy special privileges which once belonged to Israel. (This does not mean that the Lord has done away with Israel totally. The apostle Paul teaches in Romans 11:25-27 that God will bring the nation of Israel back to His fold.)



A CHOSEN GENERATION



Peter says that the believers are a “chosen generation”. What does he mean by that?

The Greek word *genos* translated “generation” stresses the source of a particular group of people. Peter's emphasis is that Christians are not only chosen by God but also a people born of God. This reminds us of what our Lord has said in John 3:6-8 – “That which is born of the flesh

is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." Believers in a church are God's chosen ones who are born of the Spirit.

This descriptive title also reminds us of God's elective love for His people. In Deuteronomy 7:7-8, God told the Israelites that He chose them solely because of His love for them – "The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: but because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt." The same is true about the election of New Testament believers, for Peter said, "Elect according to the foreknowledge (love beforehand) of God the Father" (1 Peter 1:2).

The knowledge that God has chosen us should not produce pride in us, but a thankful spirit that brings forth praise in our mouth. Every Christian must praise God ceaselessly for the privilege of being chosen by Him. Isaiah 43:21 teaches us this truth clearly – "This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise."



A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD



This is another privilege of Christians that has an Old Testament parallel. Peter's idea of a royal priesthood is drawn from Exodus 19:6

where God said to Israel, "And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests." However, Israel forfeited this privilege offered to it. When Israel apostatized and executed its Messiah, it lost the privilege of being a kingdom of priests. Peter affirms that at present, the church is the royal priesthood of God.

We not only serve the King as His priests but also reign with Him. The Greek word for "royal" (*Basileios*) can refer to a royal palace, sovereignty, crown, or monarchy. Here, the idea is royalty in general – a sphere of dominion. When we compare this thought with the teaching of 1 Peter 2:5, we see an interesting concept of the church which Peter called a spiritual house. In this verse, he also addressed the believers as "an holy priesthood". The spiritual house in which our priesthood is administered is a royal house. Therefore, we can say the church is a royal house of priests. Let us also take note that the church is God's kingdom on earth. As we are called to minister in the church, His kingdom, we function as royal priests.

Peter said in verse 5b that believers are "an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ".

Every believer in the church is a priest. The whole church is a priesthood. We are to offer "spiritual sacrifices", not "animal sacrifices". Christ, the High Priest, had already offered the eternally atoning sacrifice on our behalf, so now we do not need to sacrifice any more animals. The moment we trust in Christ, we are called into the spiritual service of the Almighty. Only if we believe in Christ can we offer effectual spiritual sacrifices to God.

Christians will spend their eternity giving offerings to the Lord God and reigning with

Christ (Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6). They will have dominion over whatever things God assigns to them. They will even rule over the angels (1 Corinthians 6:1-3).



A HOLY NATION



Christians are a “nation” (*ethnos* in Greek, from which we get the word “ethnic”). More than that, we are a “holy nation”. This means we are a people separated or set apart.

Once again, we see Peter drawing from Exodus 19:6 – “And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.” Similar expressions about Israel can be found in Leviticus 19:2; 20:26; Deuteronomy 7:6 and Isaiah 62:12. But Israel tragically forfeited this privilege by living in sin and unbelief. The tragedy of Israel’s apostasy became a blessing for the Gentiles according to Romans 11:7-12. The New Testament church, which consists of both Jews and Gentiles, has become God’s unique people. It will remain so until the nation of Israel as a whole turns in faith to the Messiah.

The root meaning of the word “holy” suggests that we have been set apart for God. Although the word indicates setting apart for God’s service, it primarily emphasizes the separation from sin and falsehood to the holiness and truth of God’s Word. The theological word used to describe this is sanctification.

Peter teaches us in 1 Peter 1:2 that the Spirit of God sanctifies us as He applies Christ’s atoning sacrifice to our lives. Thus our position before God has changed –

from the status of a condemned sinner to that of a holy nation. This new change of position, which God grants us, is often called “positional” sanctification.

Yet, 1 Peter 1:15-16 exhorts us to be “holy”. This is because when the Spirit of God sets us apart unto God, we begin to live a holy life. We begin a process of progressively being separated from sins that once reigned over us. This process is “progressive” sanctification. That is why 1 Peter 1:2 says we have been sanctified and 1 Peter 1:15-16 says we are being sanctified.



A PECULIAR PEOPLE



The word “peculiar” carries the accurate meaning of the Greek term in the original text. It means “belonging exclusively”. In other words, we are a people of possession. This reflects Exodus 19:5 – “if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people.”

The Greek word translated “peculiar” also carries the idea of purchased possession. We are acquired by God at a price. In Acts 20:28, we read: “...the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”

The church, the body of believers, belongs wholly to the Lord. What a wonderful thought!

For what purpose did God purchase us to be His peculiar people? In 1 Peter 2:9, Peter described the purpose as “that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light”.

We are to gratefully declare the wonderful works of God. This is because He has called us out of the darkness of sin into the light of His holiness and thus, we may ever be His cherished possession.



A PEOPLE OF GOD'S MERCY



In 1 Peter 2:10, the apostle described the church as that “which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy”.

Peter was applying an Old Testament description of Israel to the New Testament church. The book of Hosea tells us that the prophet's adulterous wife gave birth to a daughter. We read the rest of the story and its implications as follows: “And God said unto him, Call her name Lo-ruhamah: for I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel; but I will utterly take them away. But I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by the LORD their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen. Now when she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived, and

bare a son. Then said God, Call his name Lo-ammi: for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God. Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God” (Hosea 1:6-10).

Like Peter, Paul also applied this passage as seen in Romans 9:25-26 – “As he saith also in Osee, I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God” (cf. Hosea 2:23; 1:10).

Peter and Paul referred to the New Testament church as that which was once not a people of God but now is. We are now God's people because we have received His mercy.

All our spiritual privileges and blessings are a result of God's compassion. Let us join the psalmist and say, “But I will sing of thy power; yea, I will sing aloud of thy mercy in the morning” (Psalm 59:16). ■

**What
You Can
Do For
Bible
Witness
Media
Ministry**

1. Pray for the Bible Witness Media Ministry team.
2. Pray for the contributors of contents for the *Bible Witness* magazine and Bible Witness Web Radio.
3. Pray for more faithful and skilful labourers.
4. Introduce our Magazine and Web Radio to others for the Gospel's sake.
5. Continue to support with your generous gifts to meet the needs of the ministry.



BE AN EXEMPLARY CHURCH



The church in Thessalonica was cited by the apostle Paul as a model church. He wrote about that church in 1 Thessalonians 1:6-8 – “And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.”

It is true that no church in this world is perfect. The churches on earth consist of people who are not yet perfected. Though members of the churches are saved by God’s grace, they are still plagued by temptations, lack of knowledge of God’s Word, ill temper, bad habits, etc. However, when members of a church are wholeheartedly committed to biblical doctrines and counsels that they may be sanctified and nurtured by the truth, they provide an excellent example for all other churches to emulate.

The church at Thessalonica was in this category. Paul commended the church, saying “ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia” (verse 7). He also repeatedly mentioned that this church had

been a reason for his thanksgiving to God. He wrote in 1 Thessalonians 1:2 – “We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers.” Then in 1 Thessalonians 2:13, he wrote – “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.” Again in 1 Thessalonians 3:9, Paul gave thanks to God, saying, “For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God.”

An exemplary church will generate praise out of those who minister to them. Much praise will also rise from the hearts of those who have been blessed through their charity and service. Below are some of the spiritual characteristics of that exemplary church, which were specifically mentioned by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 1:6-8.

They received the Word

—◆—

The apostle unambiguously wrote about their response to the preaching of God’s Word; that they “received the word” (1:6).

The truth of the Gospel was brought to them through the preaching ministry of Paul and his associates. The Holy Spirit blessed their preaching of the Word with great power. The Thessalonians responded to the Spirit-empowered preaching of the Word by receiving both the message and the messengers – “And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction” (1:6).

Later in the epistle, Paul again commended the Thessalonians for their joyful acceptance of the apostolic preaching: “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (1 Thessalonians 2:13). They heartily welcomed the preaching of the Word of God. They heard it calmly, attended to it sincerely and considered it carefully. Then they accepted the preached Word by faith, with personal confidence and joy.

They followed their spiritual leaders

These new believers not only accepted the message and the messengers but also imitated their lives. In verse 6, Paul wrote, “And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord.” Certainly, they were not following blindly without discernment. They followed the apostles only because it was consistent with their following of the Lord. They were followers of both the apostles and the Lord. Following godly leaders in their godly path is consistent with following the Lord because the Lord gives us shepherds or leaders to lead us by their instructions and exemplary life.

It is important that young or new Christians learn from mature leaders in the church. Just as a newborn baby needs his parents and the family, a new Christian needs the local church and its leaders to show him how he should walk as a Christian. A church where members dissent from godly leadership cannot be a mature church. Neither can the church without an exemplary leadership be a mature and exemplary church.

If the Lord has blessed a church with godly pastors and elders, deacons and mature believers, let the entire congregation follow their Christ-honouring ways. The Thessalonians’ zeal to emulate their godly leaders so prevailed that they were themselves examples to all others. A church that is given to imitating Christ, godly pastors and exemplary churches will itself become a model church.

They suffered for Christ and His Word

Paul said in verse 6 that the Thessalonian believers received the Word “in much affliction”. The Greek word that Paul used for “affliction”, *thlipsis*, means tribulation, oppression or despair. When the Thessalonians joyfully attended to the preaching of the Word, they turned away from worshipping idols to serving God. Their quick response to the preaching of the Gospel in faith would have provoked their friends and relatives who remained loyal to their old religions. Soon violence ensued. The Thessalonian believers were persecuted by their own countrymen. In 1 Thessalonians 2:14, the apostle acknowledged that their sufferings were much like that of the Jerusalem Christians who were persecuted by their own

people. “For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews.”

Later, Paul encouraged the suffering Thessalonians: “That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know” (1 Thessalonians 3:3-4). In his second epistle, the apostle commended them for their endurance of affliction, saying, “So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure” (2 Thessalonians 1:4).

The Thessalonians were willing to sacrifice their wealth and possessions, even their very lives, in order to be loyal to the Lord Jesus in their service. Nothing they possessed was more important than their faithfulness to Christ. How about you and me? Are we prepared to sacrifice our possessions, even our lives, in the service for Christ? Dear brethren, we must be willing to suffer for Christ, if necessary. Only when we are willing and ready to risk our very lives can we fully show the world the preciousness of our faith and hope in Christ.

They rejoiced in the Spirit

It is interesting that in spite of their sufferings, the Thessalonian Christians continued to live in great joy – “in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost” (1 Thessalonians 1:6). Their

lives were not characterized by unhappiness, murmurings and unwilling service, but by great spiritual joy.

Is it not amazing that some Christians who frequently suffer tribulations seem to have greater joy in the Lord than those who live in more comfortable physical conditions? A Christian’s joy should not be determined by his circumstances but by his relationship with Christ. This was true of the Thessalonians. The source of their joy was the indwelling Holy Spirit. When they yielded themselves to the Divine Comforter with greater faith, their joy increased. The Holy Spirit is the author and nurturer of spiritual comfort and joy (Acts 9:31; 13:52). When our afflictions abound, the Spirit of God will cause our consolations and joy to abound more and more.

They encouraged other churches

By their exemplary and enthusiastic Christian living and service, the church in Thessalonica encouraged churches around them. Paul applauded them for their spiritual testimony and influence in faraway places – “So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing” (1 Thessalonians 1:7-8).

If a church does not become an encouragement, it will soon be a cause for disappointment. Paul had cited the churches of Macedonia as examples to the Corinthian church. In our text, he said that the Thessalonian church had been an encouragement to the churches



“For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.”

– 1 Thessalonians 2:13

in Macedonia and Achaia. In every way, the church at Thessalonica was exemplary.

The secret of their encouragement was found in their faith and enthusiasm in doing the work of the Lord, even in the midst of suffering. They were upfront in proclaiming God’s Word everywhere – “from you sounded out the word of the Lord”. The verb “sounded out” actually means “to sound as a trumpet”. They were trumpeting the Good News of salvation.

It is the responsibility and privilege of each local church to proclaim the message

of salvation to the lost world. Many congregations are content to pay a staff to do the witnessing and soul-winning. But in New Testament churches, the entire congregation was involved in spreading the Good News (Acts 2:44-47; 5:42).

Our church, too, can be upfront in our enthusiasm to preach the Gospel in Singapore and every place that God would open a door. If we are committed to be a mission-minded church, we will naturally become an exemplary church. May God mould us to be just that. ■

OF WHICH CHURCH

I SHOULD BE A MEMBER

When a Christian looks for a church, he is faced with the dilemma of choosing one from scores of them around him. There are denominational churches (such as Methodists, Anglicans, Presbyterians and Baptists) and also independent churches. “Of which of these,” he wonders, “should I be a member?”

Many believers are often uncertain about which church teaches the truth and is worthy of their support. In this article, therefore, I would like to give you some biblical principles for recognising a good church.

Let me begin by saying that you will never find a perfect church. However, let me point out some fundamental principles that will enable you to determine which one is a good church. Be extremely careful not to lend your assistance or support to any church that rejects the clear teaching of God’s Word.

Principles for Choosing a Biblical Church

The apostle Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 3:15 – “Thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” These words of Paul give us some very essential truths about a biblical church that believers must belong to. The following principles for choosing a biblical church are derived from 1 Timothy 3:15 and some other crucial passages.

An Unwavering Devotion to God’s Glory

Eight times the New Testament refers to the church as “the church of God”. The emphasis in this description of the church is that the church proceeds from God or that it belongs to God. God is its originator and owner. And

in contrast to the temples of dead pagan idols, Paul says that the church is of the living God (1 Timothy 3:15).

Every biblical church must therefore be God-centred rather than people-centred. A total dedication to God's glory must be seen in all its ministries. Paul wrote: "Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more" (1 Thessalonians 4:1; cf. Galatians 1:10). Unfortunately, many churches today have a "consumer-focused" attitude in their ministries, thus working to please men rather than God.

A biblical church's great concern is not to please the crowd but God. The main focus of its worship and ministry must be for the glory of God rather than making people feel good. In other words, a biblical church will not be preoccupied with people's preferences but God's will. When a church is man-oriented rather than God-oriented, it ceases to function as a biblical church.

Psalm 2:11 says, "Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling." In other words, when we worship and serve the Lord, we must come with joy and thanksgiving that is tempered with a respectful fear of God. A solemn recognition of God's greatness and holiness must prevail in the worship of God. So the apostle Peter wrote: "And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear" (1 Peter 1:17). We can come to God without terror, but that does not mean we can conduct ourselves without fear of His holiness and judgment. Concerning the early

Jerusalem church, it is written: "And fear came upon every soul" (Acts 2:43a).

A good church, therefore, will be conscious that its pre-eminent duty is not entertaining man but glorifying God. Certainly, a church should serve its people but only when that service brings glory to the Lord.

An Unswerving Loyalty to God's Word

The second characteristic of the early church was an unswerving commitment of its leaders and members to God's Word. While the apostles preached and defended the truth of God's Word, the members learned and obeyed the truth. Allegiance to God's Word is a foundational trait of every good church.

Acts 2:42 testifies to the continual devotion of the early church to the apostles' teaching – "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine..." This tells us that the early believers were earnestly and perpetually dedicated to the apostles' teaching; it also speaks of enthusiasm and excitement towards it. The Greek word translated "teaching" (*didache*) encompasses both the *content* and the *manner* of the apostles' teaching. Understanding both of these fully will help us to biblically evaluate any church today.

Concerning the content of the apostles' teaching, we have the testimony of Paul in Acts 20:20-21 – "And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."

Later, he wrote: “For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27).

The manner of the apostle’s teaching was effective and pleasing to God. The following are some vital observations concerning the manner in which the preaching of God’s Word was done in the early church:

- They preached God’s Word authoritatively and without apology. Paul wrote to Titus, a young pastor, saying, “These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee” (Titus 2:15).
- They preached God’s Word in a relevant manner. In their sermons, they answered people’s questions and doubts; they rebuked sins and erroneous teachings; they ministered peace and joy through the exposition of God’s promises; and gave guidance to those who were confused and unsure of important choices in life. Their sermons were like divine counsels for people’s needs and problems (Titus 2:1-6).
- Their messages were both evangelistic and instructional (2 Timothy 4:1-5).
- They lived a life that was consistent with their preaching. Their lives were living sermons (2 Thessalonians 3:7-9; 1 Timothy 4:11-12).

It is most appropriate at this time to consider Calvin’s words concerning the kind of church that we should choose. While commenting on Acts 2:42, he said, “Do we seek the true Church of Christ? The picture of it is here painted to the life. He begins with doctrine,

which is the soul of the Church. He does not name doctrine of any kind but that of the apostles which the Son of God had delivered by their hands. Therefore, wherever the pure voice of the Gospel sounds forth, where men continue in the profession thereof, where they apply themselves to the regular hearing of it that they may profit thereby, there beyond all doubt is the Church.”

An Undying Zeal to Spread the Gospel

A biblical church must also be actively involved in evangelistic outreaches both at home and abroad. There must be a verbal as well as a lifestyle witness for the Lord, for we are called to be the light of the world.

Jesus said, “Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:14-16). As the Lord’s people, a church should not let anything cloud its testimony. There must be constant exhortation in the church to live a life that is a witness of the transformation that Christ offers.

The Thessalonian church was commended by the apostle Paul for its fervour in spreading the Gospel – “For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad” (1 Thessalonians 1:8).

Every biblical church should make constant attempts to reach out to people in its

community with the Gospel. There must be regular efforts to do the work of evangelism through distribution of Gospel tracts, door-to-door witnessing of the Gospel, Gospel rallies, etc.

Evangelistic efforts must also be done with a worldwide perspective. The church must engage in foreign missions. Being involved in missions is an expression of the global concern of an evangelistic church. The work of the Gospel includes “going”, “preaching”, “baptising” and “teaching” (Matthew 28:18-20).

A good church will be missionary-minded. If it is so self-centred that it is occupied exclusively with its own interests, it will fail in reaching the world with the Gospel.

Zeal for the Gospel work must also be seen in the church’s prayer for those who preach the Gospel. The apostle Paul encouraged the Thessalonians, saying, “Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have *free* course, and be glorified, even as *it is with you*” (2 Thessalonians 3:1).

A sure sign of a good church is a burden for lost souls. Such a church will be committed to communicate the good news of the Gospel in the most effective manner possible.

An Undeified Love and Concern for People

Although a church is committed to sound doctrines of the Bible, if it lacks genuine love and concern for the needs of its people, it fails to be a biblical church. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13:2, “And though I have *the gift*

of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.”

A good church must care deeply for the needs of its people. For this concern to be genuinely biblical, it must not be allowed to override the priorities of sound teaching and worship. The needs of people should never become more important than God Himself or His truth. The church described in Acts 2 was thoroughly biblical in this regard, for it had a commitment to God’s truth which also expressed itself in genuine love for fellow brethren.

Acts 2:42 says that the members of the church at Jerusalem were continually devoting themselves to fellowship. They developed close relationships as they spent a significant amount of time with one another. This “togetherness” was not only physical as in regularly taking their meals together but also emotional and spiritual – verse 46 says they were “continuing daily with one accord”. They were bonded to each other in answer to their Lord’s prayer “that they all may be one” (John 17:21).

This loving unity was not only expressed by spending time together in spiritual fellowship, but also through sacrificial giving to meet the physical needs among them. They “had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all *men*, as every man had need” (Acts 2:44-45). This was not an early form of communism but a voluntary, generous sharing of resources that took place every time a specific need arose.

Some believers appeared to have lost their possessions because of persecution. Some others seemed to have lost their source of income as they followed the apostles to learn the Word. The believers who were better off sold the properties and possessions that they did not need, and then freely gave the money to those who were less fortunate. The sacrifices made by the early Christians were an indication that God was working among them and that they were a true church.

Any true church today will exhibit the same kind of concern for the needs of its members. The love of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit will compel God's people to give generously for this purpose, so that no true church will ever blindly ignore the legitimate financial or physical needs of its people. A good way to test the calibre of a certain church is to find out how it cares for the needy.

The apostle Paul advised the church in Galatia: "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all *men*, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:9-10). ■



MORE BIBLICAL GUIDELINES ON THE CHOICE OF A CHURCH

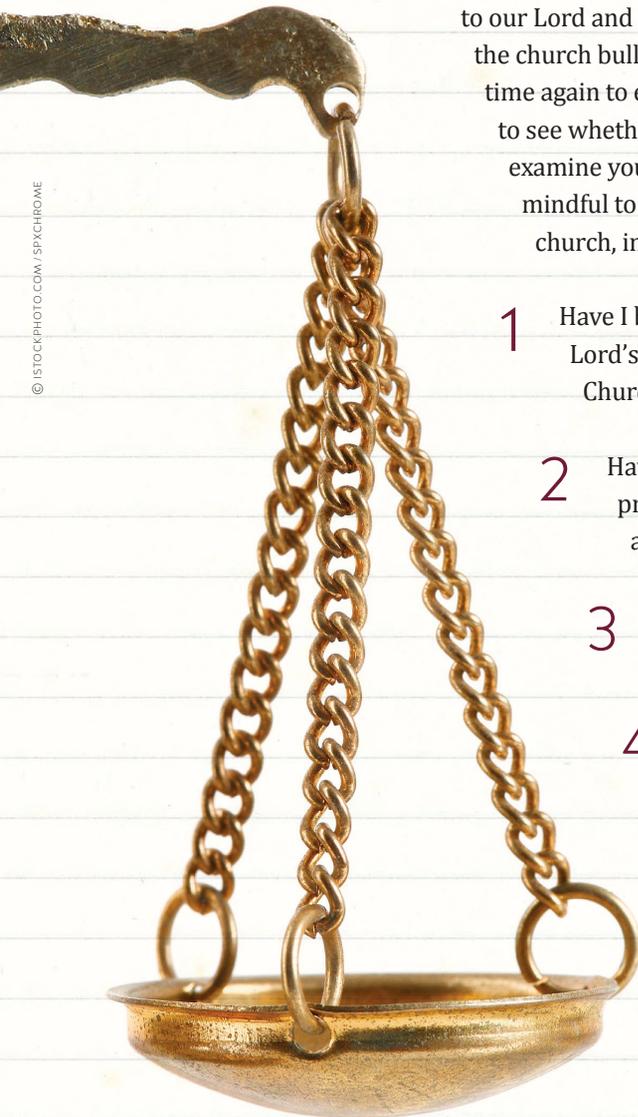
- 1 A devotion to God's Word **over all kinds of human intellectualism, philosophies and traditions.** *Read Matthew 15:2-3, 6; Mark 7:8-9, 13; Colossians 2:8.*
- 2 A devotion to preach every doctrine of the Bible **even though it displeases the hearers.** *Read Acts 20:27; Titus 2:15.*
- 3 A careful attitude to **keep human preferences out of worship and ministry** in order to keep to the biblical model for a church. *Read 1 Corinthians 4:1-3; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; 2 Timothy 4:3-5.*
- 4 A commitment to guide the people in God's truth through **sound and well-prepared sermons and Bible studies.** *Read 2 Timothy 2:15; Acts 20:27-32; 2 Corinthians 4:1-6.*
- 5 A commitment to **keep sins away from the congregation by applying church discipline** on members who live in sin unrepentantly or spread unbiblical doctrines. *Read Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15.*
- 6 A commitment to **be separated** from teachers, churches and organisations which teach false doctrines. *Read 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; Romans 16:17-18.*
- 7 **A devotion to God in prayer.** Special seasons of prayer will be held regularly in a God-focused church. *Read Acts 2:42; 1 Timothy 2:1, 8.*
- 8 A zeal towards **preaching the Gospel near and far** for the salvation of sinners. *Read Matthew 28:18-20; Romans 10:15.*
- 9 A commitment to **love and care for one another.** *Read 1 Peter 3:8; 1 John 3:17-18; Galatians 6:10.*
- 10 **A blessed hope and an eager waiting** for the return of the Lord Jesus. *Read 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10; 2 Peter 3:12-15; Titus 2:13.*

25 Questions *for* Self-Examination

Over the past 25 years, the Lord has been faithful to Gethsemane B-P Church. But have we been faithful to our Lord who has been faithful to bless us according to all His promises?

Below, I have included 25 questions that pertain to our dedication to our Lord and His church. I have published 21 of them before in the church bulletin on the occasion of our 21st anniversary. It is time again to evaluate our conduct as members of His church to see whether we have brought glory to the Lord. While you examine yourselves using the questions below, please be mindful to rededicate yourself to the Lord, the Head of the church, in thanksgiving for His goodness and faithfulness.

- 1 Have I been faithful in worshipping my Saviour every Lord's Day with His redeemed in Gethsemane B-P Church, to which He has led me to be a member?
- 2 Have I been faithful in joining the weekly prayer meeting to pray for one another and for the work of the Lord?
- 3 Would the Lord find me a hypocrite in my worship and service?
- 4 Have I done my best in fostering fellowship with other members of the church?
- 5 Have I sought diligently to learn God's Word that is being taught faithfully in the church and its fellowship groups?
- 6 Have I prayed regularly for the ministers of God's Word that His Word might be faithfully and effectively preached in church meetings?



- 7 Have I prayed for the elders and deacons that they may remain faithful and effective in their appointed roles in the church?
- 8 Have I been thankful, co-operative and submissive to godly church leaders whom God has appointed to watch over my soul?
- 9 Have I invited friends and relatives to the church to hear the preaching of the Word?
- 10 Have I yielded myself fervently to my Godgiven role in the church and its various ministries?
- 11 Have I been exemplary in my appearance, mannerism, attitude, participation and service?
- 12 Have I supported the work of the Lord with my tithes and freewill offerings?
- 13 Have I shown charity towards the needy brethren and servants of the Lord?
- 14 Have I been hospitable to God's people in the church?
- 15 Have I been forgiving, loving and longsuffering to those who have offended me?
- 16 Have I been mindful not to gossip and slander leaders and fellow brethren?
- 17 Have I esteemed others better than myself?
- 18 Have I acted selfishly and become a stumbling block to God's children?
- 19 Have I supported the foreign missions and missionaries of the church?
- 20 Have I been careful not to bring shame to the Lord and His church through unholy behaviour in society?
- 21 Have I been diligent to know and exercise my spiritual gifts for the edification of the members of the church?
- 22 Have I been quick to repent of my sins when I am rebuked through the sermons as well as counselling given by my fellow members of the church?
- 23 Have I been friendly in greeting others, getting to know them and encouraging them in the Lord?
- 24 Have I visited the sick and the needy to cheer them up and to pray for them?
- 25 Am I truly prepared for the soon coming of Christ for His Church?

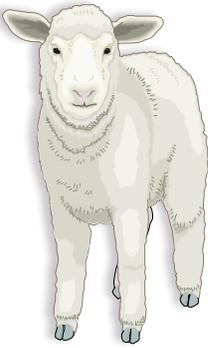
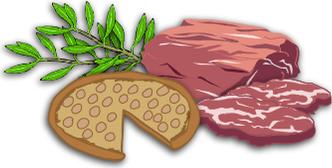
BIBLE TRIVIA - EXODUS 11 & 12

Sarah Yong

READ EXODUS 11 AND 12.

FILL IN THE BLANKS TO COMPLETE THE STORY. THE FIRST LETTER OF EACH MISSING WORD IS GIVEN.

THEN DRAW A LINE TO MATCH EACH BLOCK OF TEXT TO THE PICTURE THAT RELATES TO IT.



The LORD gave the children of Israel a new calendar. On the t_____ day of the first month, each household was to take a sheep or g____, a male of the f_____ year and without blemish.

On the f_____ day of the same month, the congregation of Israel would kill it in the e_____ and take of the blood and strike it on the upper d____ post and two side posts of the house.

That night, they were to consume the flesh with unleavened b_____ and bitter herbs. They were to eat the LORD's p_____ with their loins girded, shoes on their feet, and staff in their h_____.

At m_____, the LORD would smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt. However, the b_____ would be a token of God's protection and He would p____ over them.



When the p_____ struck, there was a cry throughout all the land. Pharaoh told M_____ and Aaron to depart with the children of Israel to go and s_____ the LORD.



The LORD gave the people f_____ in the sight of the Egyptians, and they borrowed jewels of silver and gold, r_____ and other necessities before they began their journey to S_____.



ANSWERS TO VOLUME 13 ISSUE 1: BIBLE TRIVIA - EXODUS 9 & 10 (P.19)

Boils, furnace, 4th, B; Murrain, 5th, E; Hail, fire, 7th, C; Locust, 8th, G
plague of darkness - B

Pharaoh; power; name; earth; mercy; harden.



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"But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of." – 2 Timothy 3:14



"And the gospel must first be published among all nations." – Mark 13:10



"That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations." – Psalm 67:2

