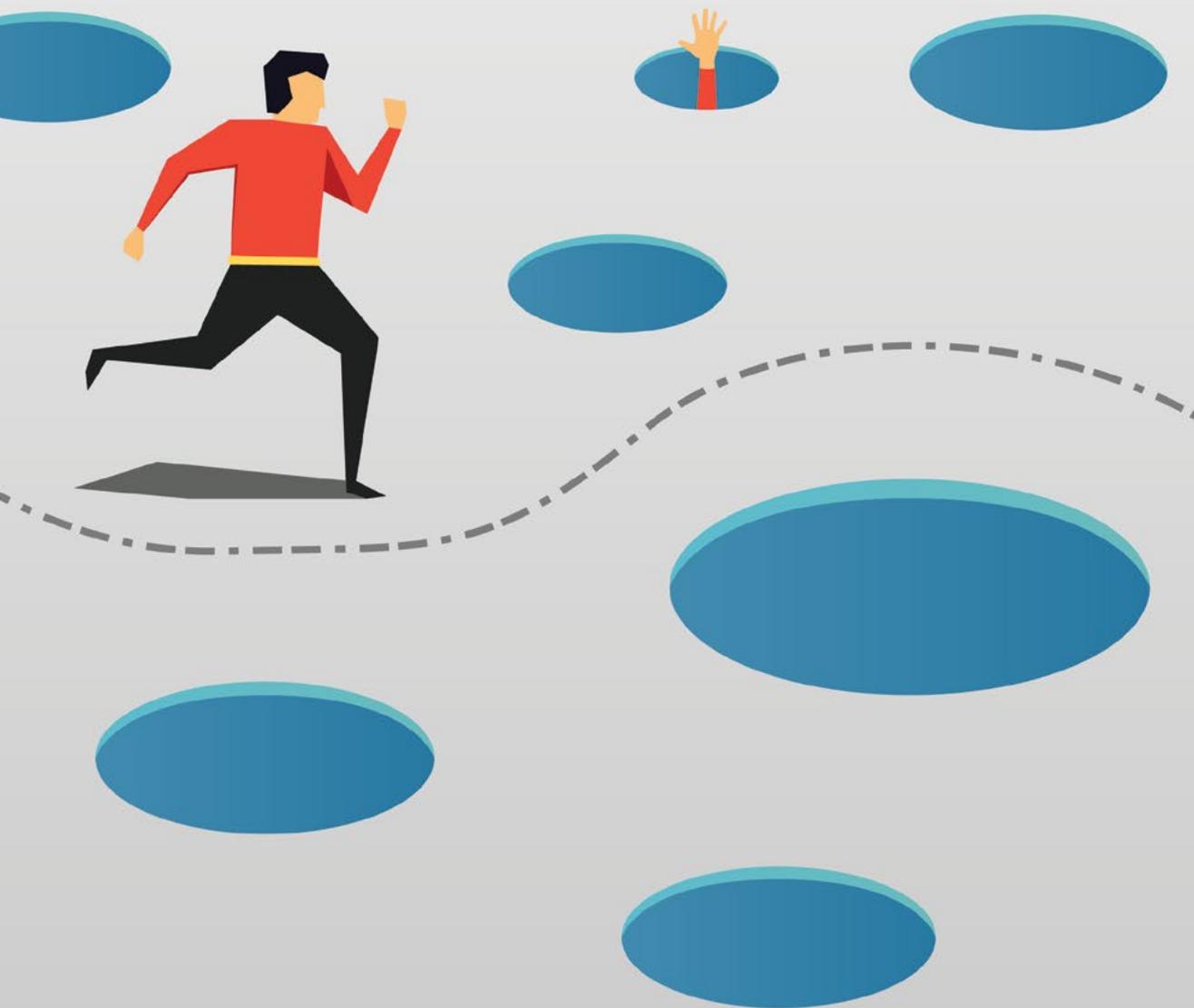


Bible Witness

MCI (P) 069 /04/2020 | ISSN: 0219-5364 | VOLUME 20 ISSUE 5 (SEPTEMBER-DECEMBER 2020)

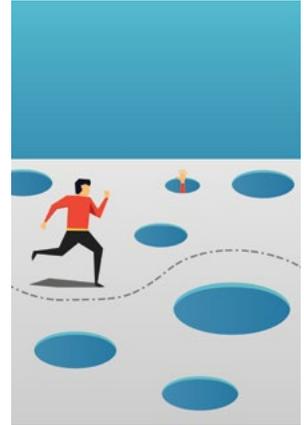
BEWARE: SPIRITUAL PITFALLS LURKING!





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SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION "Freely ye have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8). This magazine is distributed free from 2006 onwards. Postage and handling charges still apply. 2 years (12 issues): **S\$10.00** Singapore/Malaysia surface mail delivery, **S\$14.00** international surface mail delivery; **S\$26.00** Asia air mail, **S\$34.00** for air mail to all other countries. International bank draft, money order or postal order drawn on a Singapore bank in Singapore dollars may be made payable to "Gethsemane Bible-Presbyterian Church".

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BEWARE: SPIRITUAL PITFALLS LURKING!

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BEWARE OF CONFORMING TO THIS WORLD

(ROMANS 12:2)

SAMSON HUTAGALUNG

As saints of God who are born again, God's wrath has been lifted from us, and the enmity between God and us removed. This very blessed favour also automatically makes us sworn enemies with Satan and puts us at cross purposes with this glittering world. No exaggeration to say that daily we have to contend with the attractive pull and relentless temptations of this ungodly world. How strong we grow in our Christian faith depends on how much we obey God's Word and separate ourselves from worldliness. Hence the apostle Paul's pertinent admonition in the following emphatic imperative in Romans 12:2—"And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

Paul wants to remind believers of the spiritual danger ahead in their Christian journey as they embark on their new life in Christ. As we pass the time of our sojourning here on earth, we should not take Christian living lightly. We must beware of the temptations and snares of the devil along life's (rough and rocky) journey as we, enabled and empowered by the Holy Spirit, press on toward our final destiny, even our glorification when we see Christ face to face.

Keep Unspotted from the World

To submit to this command would mean that believers should not imitate the behaviour and follow the customs of the world; nor

"And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

—Romans 12:2

should they think and act as the vast majority of the world. A distinction between a Christian's way of life and that of the world is demanded. The two cannot harmonise—"know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?" (James 4:4a). Though we have been called out of darkness into God's marvellous light, it is still easy for us to fall into the world's mould because of the relentless bombardment of the world's influences. Undeniably, there are deeply-entrenched ungodly worldviews and lifestyles to contend with, as we swim against the tide of this corrupt world around us—and fight the good fight of faith!

Here's where believers need to keep a close watch on their personal lives and "walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise" (Ephesians 5:17). To pay heed to this warning of not conforming to this world would entail self-examination of heart, behaviour, thought and attitude. In the light of the preserved, infallible, inerrant and perfect Word of God, ask yourselves some relevant questions to examine

your *real* heart: Are you walking right in the sight of God? Are you sure what you are doing right now is in accordance with God's Word? Is your conscience clear concerning the things you are engaging in? Are you sure that God is on your side, and not against you?

As saints of God, believers are declared righteous by the imputation of Christ's righteousness on them (cf. Romans 4:5–6). God has set rules by which believers ought to live—not as a compelled group of people but as the beloved of God, constrained by the Spirit to live a holy and acceptable life unto God (cf. Romans 12:1). As such, believers' lives should not be conformed to the principles of this world, where lust and wickedness are its prevailing motivation. Paul equated worldly living with the works of the flesh, in which the gratification of the flesh is the ultimate goal, as articulated in Galatians 5:19–21—“Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told *you* in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”

World Under Satan's Grip

What Paul has stated in the above verse is indeed the depraved inclination and craving of the world. Being lustful and sinful is in line with the nature of the people of the world, who constantly

seek to satisfy their lusts and pleasures. Not satisfied with just the unbelieving world being under his grip, Satan is trying through all means to entice believers to fall into his traps and snares as well. Thus, believers ought to be aware of this lurking danger, and have the same mindset as Paul who said, “we are not ignorant of his (*Satan's*) devices” (2 Corinthians 2:11). Sadly, even Christians have been enticed to follow Satan and his desires, when they let their spiritual guard down and “[give] heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils (1 Timothy 4:1).

No wonder Paul has to remind us that the constant war believers are facing is “not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12). The unseen enemies endeavour to entice Christians to be conformed to “the (wicked) course of this world” (Ephesians 2:2a). The “course of this world” has nothing in common with the righteous paths that God delights in; it is against all that God's Word stands for. In fact, the world's thinking and practices are under the influence of the “prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2b). This is a reference to Satan, who works in the hearts and minds of unregenerate men completely dominated by “the lusts of [their] flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind” (Ephesians 2:3). For that reason, believers should not follow the principles of this world. For sure, the world will try to subtly (even secretly) and gradually poison the minds of many by vain thoughts, unwholesome ambitions, and undue love for the praise and honour of this world. But

believers must always remember that they are different from the world.

While the world tries to pursue personal happiness and advancement of self as their ultimate goal in life, believers' chief end in life is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. To fulfil this end means to serve God and to advance His will. If anyone finds himself in a compromising situation that detracts from the glory of God, it is imperative for him to practise biblical separation (that he may come out from the snare of the devil), as commanded by Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:17–18—“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”

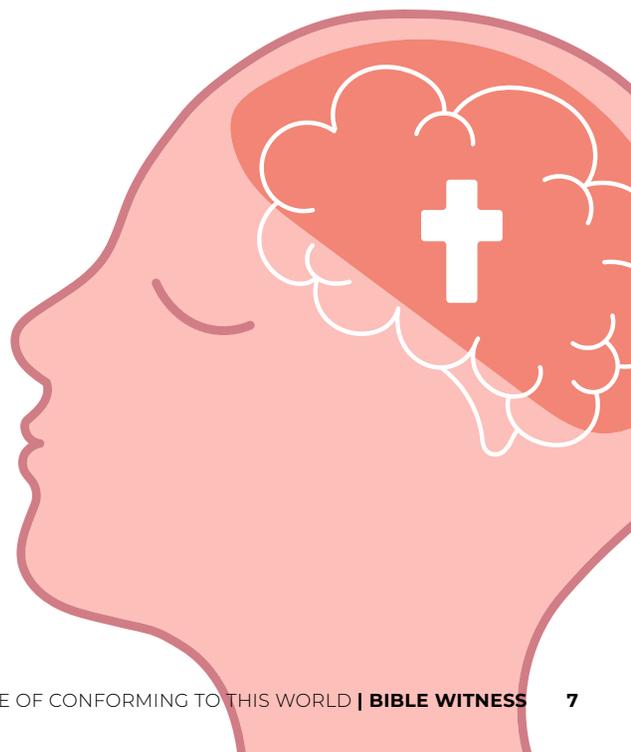
Do not be deceived. Having close association with this world will lead one to entertain a sensual lifestyle, and even to be unequally yoked together with unbelieving companionship—in short, to be under Satan's grip!

Be Transformed by the Renewing of Mind

Here's where a “renewed mind” comes in: “be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2b). Believers are to have a radical transformation by the renewing of their minds. They are to change their thinking pattern from worldliness to godliness. The Greek present tense

of the verb used here tells us that God desires the renewal of mind to be an ongoing, continual, prevailing action. Only then can a victorious Christian life in accordance with the will of God be a reality. It can be literally translated as: “be ye continually transformed by the renewing of your mind”—through God's Word, of course!

Exercising the mind on spiritual things, guided by the Holy Scriptures, will bring about this desired spiritual outcome in our daily living. Giving our heart and mind to dwell on what the Lord has commanded through His written Word (the Scriptures) is the utmost important spiritual exercise for every believer. In so doing, he is able to differentiate between the godly and the worldly, and thereby keep from being trapped by the snares of the devil. This discernment to be able to avoid such a spiritual pitfall is affirmed by Paul when he said that “ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Romans 12:2c). Without a continually renewed mind,



the distinction between one's own will and God's will can be blurred, leading many to follow the worldly desires and ambitions.

To renew our mind is to nurture our mind to think biblically. "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7a). Feeding the mind with God's Word is the only way to make wise the simple and enlighten the eyes, as well as keep it pure (cf. Psalm 19:7-8). Indeed, "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed *thereto* according to thy word" (Psalm 119:9). God desires His redeemed to know His will, that they may conduct their lives in accordance with God's perfect will, as revealed in the Scriptures. All those who call themselves believers in Christ must examine everything they are engaged in, and ascertain whether or not these are in tandem with the world and its philosophies and value systems. If deemed to be conforming to this world, Christians do well to give them up!

Conclusion

There are ultimately only two ways in which people ever live in this world—either he conforms to this world or he is being transformed by the Word. This transformation is not achieved by self-empowerment or self-determination. It is only by the working power of God in the believers' heart that Christians can live a life that stands opposed to the worldly and ungodly lifestyles.

Believers are to display a transformed life as evidence that they are led by the Spirit of God. This transformation begins at the moment of believing in Christ, and continues throughout life. Let us stop being conformed to "this present evil world" (Galatians 1:4), which "passeth away, and the lust thereof" (1 John 2:17). Rather, let us, with a renewed mind, "follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life" (1 Timothy 6:11b-12a)! ■

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BEWARE OF BEING HEARERS ONLY

(JAMES 1:22)

HO KEE HOW

The apostle James, contrary to what many superficial Bible-scholars claimed, is never in conflict with the apostle Paul in upholding the truth that we are all saved “by grace ... through faith; and ... not of works” (Ephesians 2:8–9). Regeneration is appropriated by faith alone—*Sola Fide!* Then why is James in his epistle focusing so much on “works” and on “doing”? While Paul talks about faith without works, James seems to be talking about faith with works! Well, both are reconcilable.

Notice that James never says that “faith **plus** works result in salvation”, but rather “faith results in salvation **plus** works”. James is actually emphasising the kind of faith that saves, namely a working faith—one which produces visible fruit in a truly born-again believer’s life, which is characterised by patient endurance under trial (cf. James 1), care for the needy (cf. James 1), impartial treatment

of rich and poor people alike (cf. James 2), temperance in speech (cf. James 3), purity and peaceableness in character (cf. James 3), separation from worldliness (cf. James 4), prayerfulness in all situations (cf. James 5), etc. Faith without works (to be specific, *without consequent works*) is false, James warns!

Prevalence of the “Professing Christian” Syndrome

Now, the Epistle of James, we believe, is the first book to be written in the New Testament. There is circumstantial and contextual evidence to this. James was the earliest among the apostles to be martyred—not long after the first church in Jerusalem was established.

In Acts 8:1, we read that “at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they (the disciples) were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.” About that time, King Herod “stretched forth *his* hands to vex certain (probably leaders) of the church. And he killed James the brother of John (Zebedee) with the sword” (Acts 12:1–2). So James would have written his epistle rather early prior to his martyrdom. Moreover, we note that James is writing primarily to “the twelve tribes (a particular reference to Jewish Christians) which are scattered abroad” (James 1:1). This correlates well with the early period of the New Testament church (before the apostle Paul came on the Gospel scene) when Christianity was largely confined to Jewish circles.

During this early church period, James, stationed at Jerusalem, would have observed the conduct of many Jewish-Christian returnees to Jerusalem for the yearly feasts. (He would also have heard reports brought by some of them about other Christians scattered abroad.) Undoubtedly, what he observed or heard must have caused him great concern; their conduct fell far short of the righteous standards that the Christian’s profession of faith demanded. Apparently, he felt concerned enough to write a letter to address this (what we call) “professing-Christian” syndrome, which is just as prevalent (and a pertinent issue to address) in this day and age.

The modern church, unfortunately, is full of self-proclaimed Christians—but many are not true believers. Many

are Christians so-called, but few are disciples! Come to think of it, wasn’t it the same situation in Jesus’ day? When Jesus was in Jerusalem at Passover during the initial stage of His public ministry, though “many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did”, He “did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all *men*, and ... what was in man” (John 2:23–25). He knew all sorts of motives with which the masses came unto Him—for excitement, for mere healing, to be fed with food, to have their ears tickled with good stories, to see sensational happenings, to be part of the crowd, etc. The same is true today, as it was then in Jesus’ day. Many come to church for wrong motives—for friendship, for emotional needs to be met, to look for life-partner, to establish business contacts, to get material benefits from the church, etc.—for anything but to be a disciple of Christ! Jesus has this unflattering description to say of them: “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me” (Matthew 15:8).

Alas, many so-called Christians today have allowed their “profession of faith” to become mere lip-service. Their words and actions do not tally. They say one thing, but their attitude, life’s conviction, value system portray another. Incidentally, the word “profession” is translated from the Greek root word (*homologeō*), which literally means “to say the same thing”. Ironically, these professing Christians’ words and actions do not say the same thing! Jesus would not entrust Himself to such professing believers. Neither did James, who was most concerned about the inconsistency

between Christians' confession and their conduct. Hence his epistle and, in particular, his admonition in James 1:22—"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."

Faith Cometh by "Hearing"

Unquestionably, the apostle James recognised, right at the outset, that "faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). God's Word is instrumental to our new birth, the result of which is "that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures" (James 1:18b). In the Old Testament, before the ancient Israelites began the full harvest of their crops, they were to bring the first crops that farmers had gathered—called the "firstfruits"—to the priests as an offering to the LORD (cf. Leviticus 23:10). The firstfruits belonged specially to God. Thus, this agricultural metaphor of "firstfruits" is used to affirm that the believers are the peculiar (i.e. unique, one of its kind) possession of God. And with this privileged, elevated spiritual status, come great responsibilities concerning our conduct as God's children.

One of such is our personal responsibility in progressive sanctification, which is through "the washing of water by the word" (Ephesians 5:26). James alludes to this in v. 19a: "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear". A constant readiness and eagerness to hear God's Word is enjoined here. We are to listen with rapt attention

to instructions from God's Word being preached and taught. This holy desire and delight to feed on God's truths is paramount if we are to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The constant increase in our knowledge of God's Word is represented by our being swift to hear "the word of truth" (v. 18a).

This "word" is also interestingly described by James as "the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls" (v. 21b). Now, the Greek word (*emphutos*) translated as "engrafted" is a compound word consisting of two root words—*en* (which denotes "in the interior"), and *phuteuo* (which means "to spring up and grow"). It conveys the picture of God's Word being implanted deep in the mind and causing new life to spring up from within. Indeed, the communication of divine truths is like seeds sown in the hearts and minds of the hearers, and which has potent life and power packed within, waiting to germinate and blossom. When received by receptive hearts, the "engrafted"



Word of God results in saving faith, which is also a fruitful faith.

engrafted
(Greek *emphutos*)
“to spring up and grow
from within”

Deception of Not Practising What You Hear

Having firmly established that the key to our Christian conduct lies in the receiving and embracing of God’s Word, James went on to touch a raw nerve: “But be ye ... not hearers only” (v. 21a)! James could envisage many Christians saying, “We all love to hear God’s Word”, priding themselves in being “swift to hear”. Therein lies a potential great danger. In their “swift” hearing of Scriptural truths, they sometimes do so perfunctorily without allowing time for these truths to sink in and take root in their lives. Their practice lags far behind their head knowledge of God’s Word. They are “hearers only”, stopping short of becoming “doers of the word”. Please do not think that the word “hearers” refer to disinterested people who are casual and careless in their hearing. On the contrary, the Greek word (*akroatai*) translated as “hearers” actually means

attentive hearers with a real interest in acquiring knowledge. But they do so without a sense of accountability.

How sad to have people thinking they are Christians through easy-believism, without the commitment to put biblical truths into practice. There are no spiritual virtues added to their so-called faith; they do not “add to [their] faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity” (2 Peter 1:5-7). Neither do they manifest the fruit of the Spirit [which is “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Galatians 5:22-23)] in their lives. They are not interested to “lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset [them]” (Hebrews 12:1b), nor are they stirred to “fight the good fight of faith” (1 Timothy 6:12a). Christianity to them is just a religion of external appearances, not a transformation of mind and life. Such a stance is in direct contravention of Paul’s biblical injunction in Romans 12:1-2, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”

James warns this is nothing but pure self-deception. If you are “hearers only” and not “doers of the word”, you are “deceiving your own selves”. The Greek word translated as “deceiving”

is a compound word consisting of the prefix *para* (which means “beside”) and the root verb *logizomai* (meaning “to reason logically”). James is literally saying that a “hearer only” is beside himself—he is out of his (logical) mind! He who constantly takes in biblical knowledge without ever applying it in practice is doing himself a great disfavour. He not only misses out on the true purpose and joys he can have in his life, he is also exposing himself to great spiritual dangers, setting himself up for a tragic end. In short, he is deluding himself and great will be his fall (cf. Matthew 7:26–27)!

A biblical example of someone who knew divine truth but still chose to disregard its application in practical life is the “just but vexed” Lot. Lot knew that God had given him much wealth and material prosperity, for he “had flocks, and herds, and tents”, and his “substance was great” (Genesis 13:5–6). He ought to have “godliness with contentment”, which “is great gain” (1 Timothy 6:6). He chose not to be a “doer of the word”. He thought he had it all figured out. In “pitch[ing] his tent” towards affluent and prosperous (but exceedingly wicked) Sodom (Genesis 13:12b–13), he was not thinking logically. He reckoned that he could somehow “serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24), but in the end lost all that he had—his wife and family (to worldliness), and even the chastity of his two remaining daughters (cf. Genesis 19:15–36). He himself was saved only by the skin of his teeth! Lot is a classic case of one who, being a “hearer only” and not feeling the necessity of practising the truths he had heard, deceived his own self—and lost everything he had built up!

deceiving
(Greek *paralogizomai*)
“to be out of one’s
logical mind”

Wise Hearers Are “Doers”

Without a doubt, spiritual safety lies in “doing”, which results in continual spiritual growth. Thus James commands us to “be ye doers of the word”. Now, the underlying sense of the Greek verb (*ginesthe*) translated as “be ye” is “to come into a new state of being”. It literally means “become ye”! This hints of our regenerate life here—“Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17). For sure, the moment we become regenerated, though we are sanctified positionally, we need to go through progressive sanctification, which is ongoing throughout our entire Christian life. This is corroborated by the Greek tense of this imperative, which carries the idea of continuity. In other words, we cannot expect to be just born-again and be perfected instantaneously; we keep becoming perfected as we do the things that please God, in accordance with His Word. How well we fare on our Christian journey depends on how diligently we build up ourselves in our most holy faith, by becoming continual “doers” of God’s Word.

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Instructively, the Greek word translated as “doers” refers to “a performer of actions due to an inner urge, not out of habitual routine”. This should preclude going through the motion in carrying out religious duties, as well as doing things in a ritualistic, perfunctory manner, devoid of fervency and zeal. Whatsoever the hand of a “doer of the word” findeth to do in obedience to God’s Word, he does it with his might, and with his heart, soul, mind and strength! This is spiritual proof of one’s true faith in Christ. A faith that stops short of “doing” and doesn’t go beyond “hearing” is a dead faith. “Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone”, James warns (2:17)! Wise indeed is the hearer who is a continual doer; he that hath ears to hear, let him hear—wisely!

Conclusion

In the final analysis, James wants his Christian readers to know that Christianity is not an academic faith. It is a vibrant faith of works and deeds, for the man who possesses such faith shall be “a doer of the work” and “be blessed in his deed” (James 1:25b). The apostle James is unambiguous in his teaching of a transformed life in Christ. As we grow in grace, we cannot be mere *professing* Christians; instead we are to be *progressing* Christians. May the Lord help us to steer clear of this spiritual pitfall of being “hearers only”, which (according to James) is tantamount to self-deception! Brethren, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves” (2 Corinthians 13:5a). May we prove (i.e. give evidence of) our faith by **hearing and doing** God’s Word! ■

BEWARE OF HARBOURING HIDDEN PRIDE

(JAMES 4:5, 10)

HO KEE HOW

The more established we are in the Christian faith, the more elevated in Christian service, the greater we have to grapple with this struggle with pride in life. Very few readers will disagree (with this writer) that it did not take us long to realise that after becoming a Christian, we are entered into a formidable (spiritual) arena of conflict. Besides having to contend with our adversary—the devil—who “as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8) by tempting and oppressing us, as well as the relentless pull and attraction of this ungodly world in which we live, there is this inner conflict with self to struggle with. Of the three enemies (*devil, world, self*), the most terrible is arguably the third one, which constitutes (what we call) the “inner battlefield”! Even if, for argument’s sake, we could somehow shut out Satan and the world, our own inborn corruptions are enough to work our ruin.

Our “Inner Battlefield”

“For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.” The apostle Paul’s words in Romans

7:19 perhaps sum up this inner struggle most succinctly. We are all too familiar with the downward pull of “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” inherent in us, ever lurking to drag us down into sin if we but just lower our guard. As such, our constant fear ought to be, to use Paul’s words, “lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway (*or be disqualified*)” (1 Corinthians 9:27b), by failing to be “overcomers” in this inner battlefield!

“For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.”

—1 John 2:16

And one of the greatest struggles we have to grapple with, is in the overcoming of pride, especially hidden

pride. Why is it so difficult to overcome pride? Perhaps we could ask this same question another way: Why is it so difficult to be truly humble? Simply because it goes against the very grain of our nature! Scripture testifies to us of this fact through the apostle James' rhetorical question: "Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?" (James 4:5). Now, the word "spirit" that James uses here is not referring to the Holy Spirit, but rather to the immaterial part of man's being, as distinct from man's body. Man is made up of two parts, body and soul (or spirit). "Soul" and "spirit" are used interchangeably in the Bible. The spirit or soul is the seat of our intellect, emotions and will—which, being tainted by original sin, is (according to James 4:5) said to have a strong inclination towards "envy". Whether we admit it or not, man's natural tendency is to resent others having a better deal than oneself—that's envy! Envy is being sad about someone else's success or blessing, and (perverse as it sounds) being glad about someone else's failure or trouble. Envy is a consuming desire to put everyone down to your level, or better still, one level below you. The objective is to have self emerge as number one. At the root of envy is preoccupation with self—self-elevation, in short, **pride!**

James, in saying "The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy", is here reminding believers that as long as we live on this earth, still in our mortal state (while awaiting our glorification), we have to constantly contend with this "lust" (or craving) to be number one. Because of this craving to be number one, humility is one of the hardest lessons to learn. The moment

you think you've learnt it, is the very moment you have lost it! Indeed, there are some people who think they're very humble and seem to be proud of it; yet being proud of one's humility is a contradiction in terms! Humility is a lifelong lesson. Even after so many spiritual victories in this area, you can still fall at the next hurdle.

Spiritual Men Not Exempt from this Inner Struggle

One such sobering biblical example can be gleaned from a particular narrative episode (in **Judges 8:22–27**) about that well-known hero of faith—Gideon. Oh, the fact that one of our favourite heroes of faith (mentioned in Hebrews 11) could falter in learning this lesson, should humble us and make us realise how vulnerable we all are in this area. Even the best of Christians can fall prey to spiritual pride! We shall now take a closer look at Gideon's harbouring of his secret desire for self-elevation.

Now, Bible-readers would be familiar with the background to this text. God had just given the Israelites great victory over their bitter enemies, the Midianites, through the valiant leadership of Gideon. In the euphoria of such decisive victory, came the men of Israel with their exuberant offer to Gideon to set up a dynastic rule: "Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also: for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian" (v. 22). Such was their sense of gratitude—which is not hard to fathom, given how much they had suffered

under “the hand (i.e. oppressive might) of Midian”. From Judges 6:1–7, we learn that for 7 consecutive years, the Midianites had conducted yearly raids to impoverish their land. Each year just before harvest-time, they would come up in multitude to plunder the fertile land of Israel, and strip it of crops and livestock, so much so that “Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites” (6:6a). They were in no position to oppose the invaders, and could only take refuge in “dens which *are* in the mountains, and caves, and strong holds” (6:2b), until the plunderers left the land. How pathetic! Then stepped in Gideon onto the scene ... (cf. Judges 7). No wonder the liberated Israelites felt so grateful to their deliverer that they were willing for him to rule over them! The Hebrew word (*mashal*) for “rule” has the idea of having dominion over and governing the affairs of the people—in other words, the exercise of kingship! That’d mean having great control over the livelihoods, movements, work, private lives of all the people.

But Gideon knew better; he knew he had no such authority nor mandate: “I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the LORD shall rule over you” (v. 23). You could say, Gideon knew his theology well. God is the rightful King over Israel. He knew full well that it was the LORD who gave him the ultimate victory. Yet his heart was somewhat stirred by the lavish praise of mortal and misguided men around him. For sure, it had been a memorable victory; why not do something to perpetuate the remembrance of that memorable victory? It seemed good to let the whole town keep talking about his achievements—

good for the nation’s morale (and, of course, good for his ego)!

Hence his subtle request: “I would desire a request of you, that ye would give me every man the earrings of his prey” (v. 24). The word “prey” would refer to their victims. Judges 8:10b tells us that “there fell an hundred and twenty thousand men that drew sword” of the enemy camp, implying there would have been a potentially great plunder of 240,000 golden earrings! Notice the manner of Gideon’s request. The phrase “desire a request” in the Hebrew is an interesting expression. It speaks of an earnest beseeching that reflects an intensive yearning and that betrays a strong, deep-seated aspiration. He had an ulterior motive in requesting for all those golden earrings!

Even in his subtle request, Gideon was being discreet. He didn’t need all of the 240,000 earrings of the slain enemies. He only needed a specific amount (according to his estimation) for the specific vain purpose he had in mind: “And the weight of the golden earrings that he requested was a thousand and seven hundred *shekels* of gold” (v. 26a). Just how much is this specific amount of “1,700 shekels”? Now, we know from the episode of Abraham’s servant’s searching for a bride for Isaac, that he gave Rebekah “a golden earring of half a shekel weight” (Genesis 24:22). So, if 1 golden earring weighs $\frac{1}{2}$ *shekel*, then 2 golden earrings would weigh 1 *shekel*. Thus (simple arithmetic tells us that) 1,700 *shekels* would be the equivalent weight of 3,400 golden earrings. Gideon reckoned that 3,400 golden earrings should be enough for his mini-smelting project.

He wasn't all that covetous—but he was vain. We next see him going about to bring his vain purpose to pass...

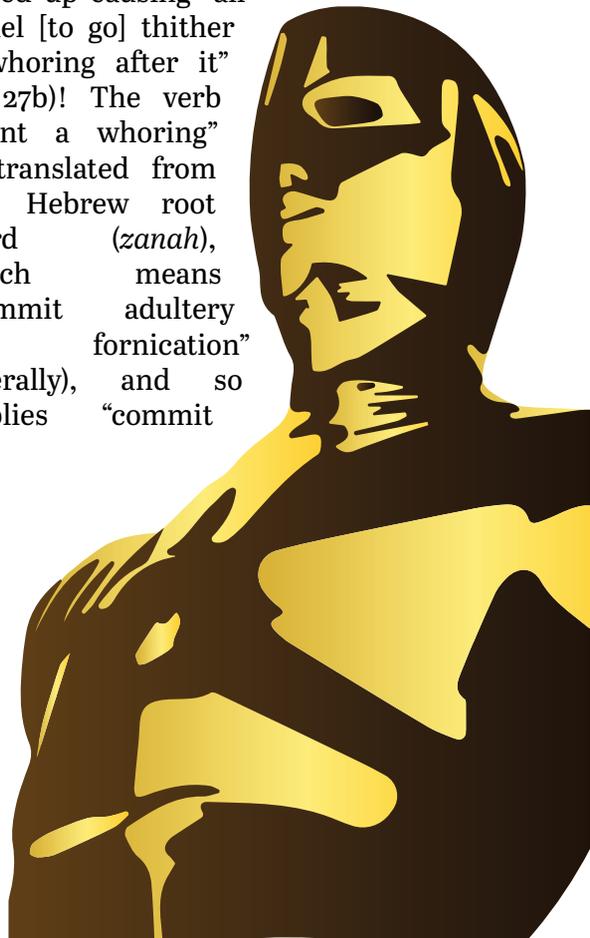
Vain Attempt at Self-Glorification

“And Gideon made an ephod thereof, and put it in his city, *even* in Ophrah” (v. 27a). Reading between the lines, Gideon must have gotten the help of a smelter, had the golden earrings burnt down in a furnace of earth, and remoulded the molten gold into a golden sculpture. The question is: What is that sculpture and what does it signify? It is in the shape of an “ephod”. An ephod is the outer vestment worn over a high priest’s shoulder. So, the golden sculpture would be shaped like a human torso—the upper body of a man. What’s the purpose? The clue is found in that it was “put ... in his (Gideon’s) city, *even* in Ophrah”. The word “put” is translated from a most unique Hebrew word (*yatsag*), which means “to establish, set up for a permanent remembrance”. It is not put up for decorative purposes, but for, as it were, a memorial! It is meant to evoke memories of that famous victory over the hated Midianites (and probably national patriotism as well). Because of that, some Bible-

scholars believe that there might have been a head attached to it—making the golden sculpture like unto a *bust*. Much like what many societies do, in their attempt to honour their eminent citizens and famous personalities. Bust-like sculptures have been erected all over the world in memory of pioneer leaders (who founded cities), well-known philanthropists (who founded hospitals and educational institutions), and so on. We can’t be dogmatic here, but it stands to reason to suppose that this golden “ephod” could be something like a bust-like sculpture. If that’s the case, guess whose likeness was depicted by the head? Who else but the hero of the hour himself!

That’s why the Bible says, “which thing became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house” (v. 27c). What began as a vain attempt at self-glorification, ended up causing “all Israel [to go] thither a whoring after it” (v. 27b)! The verb “went a whoring” is translated from the Hebrew root word (*zanah*), which means “commit adultery or fornication” (literally), and so implies “commit

put
(Hebrew *yatsag*)
“to establish, set up for a permanent remembrance”



idolatry” (figuratively). People came from all over the land to Ophrah to pay homage and admire the sculpture, to the extent that the golden ephod became an object of worship. That’s why it became a “snare” (i.e. bait with a hidden trap to catch one unawares, causing unintended sorrows) to Gideon. Certainly, Gideon hadn’t expected the Israelites to worship the sculpture—he truly wanted only God to be worshipped. He himself didn’t worship the sculpture; it was meant only as a memorial to remind people of past victories. But he underestimated the depraved human nature and the people’s idolatrous inclination! Gideon, in unwittingly being instrumental in leading the Israelites to idolatry, had his reputation impugned and his honour forfeited. You could say, he had been ensnared by the devil, who “as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour”—through the temptation of pride!

That’s not all. We see another subtle attempt at self-exaltation in his naming of a son. Gideon, unfortunately, “had many wives” (Judges 8:30) and on top of it, he had a concubine, who “also bare him a son, whose name he called Abimelech” (Judges 8:31). The word translated as “called” is not the usual Hebrew word (*qara*) used for the calling of an offspring’s name. It is a rather special word (*sim*), which means “to appoint, designate for publicity purposes”. So, he’s giving his son a special title here. The name “Abimelech” is made up of two root words—“*abi*” (which means “my father”) and “*melek*” (meaning “king”). It literally means “My father is king”! So each time anyone asked the boy for his name, the whole world

would be reminded—by his reply—that his father (Gideon himself) was (supposedly) king! Oh, what vainglory!

went a whoring
(Hebrew *zanah*)
lit. “to commit
adultery or
fornication”;
metaphorically “to
commit idolatry”

Beware the Test of Prosperity!

How we wish these unsavoury incidents were never mentioned about our hero of faith! We do observe a deplorable example highlighted here of self-exaltation. But that’s what exactly makes the Bible so true and honest: it depicts God’s saints as they are—warts and all! God’s Word records them as mighty in God’s strength, yet vulnerable and susceptible to sin’s attack—that we may be warned, be admonished, and beware of spiritual pitfalls lurking along our Christian journey.

Gideon’s two vain attempts at self-glorification—the setting up of a little memorial in his home-city for people to remember him by, and the public official naming of his son for self-exaltation purposes—are most

instructive to us. These demonstrate to us that perhaps we find ourselves more spiritually vigilant and motivated to honour God through some outstanding action in the hour of crisis, than for us to do so amid our ordinary, everyday living (which requires no less commitment, faithfulness, and a fair bit of humble perseverance). Sometimes, by God's grace, we may be able to come through the test of adversity with flying colours (like Gideon), but we may find ourselves wanting in the test of prosperity! For prosperity and ease have an unnerving way of lowering our guard and lulling us to spiritual complacency. The devil knows how and when to stir our thoughts and hidden ambitions, especially when our ways are prospering. In the aftermath of some spiritual success, he oftentimes offers cunning suggestions through people, events and even the success itself, in order to instil pride in us.

Humble Yourselves in the Sight of God

Hence the Scriptural exhortation in James 4:10—"Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up." It is instructive to note that the Greek verb (*tapeinothete*) translated as "humble yourselves" is in the passive voice. That means you are the recipient, being acted upon by the agent, which (in the context) is none other than God Almighty Himself. Scripture is literally saying, "Be humbled in the sight of the Lord". This perhaps tells us that there is nothing we can assertively do to rid ourselves of pride. You cannot, for instance, make a new-year resolution and say to yourself: "This year, I want

to be more humble"—and then actively work on it. No! It doesn't work that way.

God, in His Providence, allows situations to arise in our lives that may overwhelm us and cause us to be "troubled on every side", "perplexed", "cast down" (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:8–9). He may sometimes allow afflictions and trials to come into our lives to bring us to our knees, and to make us realise how flimsy it is to trust in our own natural endowments and abilities. In response, we, in our Christian walk of faith (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:7), abandon ourselves trustingly to the Heavenly Father's sovereign Providence and joyfully accept our lot by willingly going through those trying circumstances, without murmuring or fretting. In the process, we are moulded—that is how we are made humble. Scripture is replete with such biblical pattern in the moulding of God's choice servants. Ready examples that come to mind include the lives of Joseph, Moses, Daniel, among others.

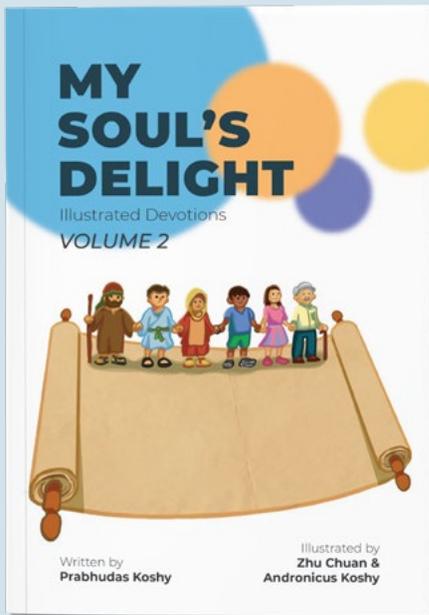
That's not all. Notice the second part of the verse—"and he shall lift you up". God's promise is that if we allow ourselves to be put in a lower (or even obscure) position by the Providence of God, God will exalt us in due time. This exaltation is not self-effected through any special manoeuvring on our part. God's condition for exaltation is unambiguous: we are to allow ourselves to be humbled—"before honour is humility" (Proverbs 15:33b; cf. 18:12b). Exaltation is not what we seek out, but something bestowed upon us—"LORD, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me" (Psalm 131:1).

Conclusion

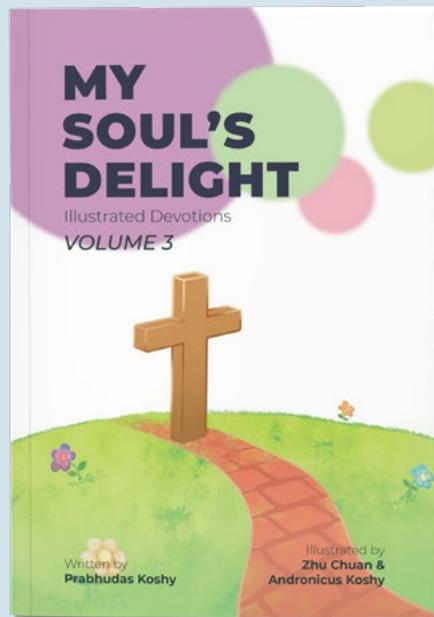
Dear brethren, overcoming pride is a lifelong lesson. As mentioned at the outset, the more established we are in the Christian faith, the more elevated in Christian service, the greater we've had to grapple with this struggle in life. May we be ever vigilant in examining ourselves daily in the various facets of our Christian life and in all our dealings with fellow brethren, lest we do things with self-seeking agenda and ulterior motives. Indeed, "Who can understand *his* errors? cleanse

thou me from secret *faults* (including secret *pride*). Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous *sins* (which smack of arrogance and self-pride); let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression" (Psalm 19:12-13).

May our prayer thus be: "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if *there be any* wicked (including prideful) way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23-24). Amen. ■



*Covers not final.



MY SOUL'S DELIGHT

Volumes 2 & 3 are currently in production. Please pray for the BWMM team as we work to finalise these two illustrated devotionals for print.

BEWARE OF FALLING FROM YOUR OWN STEDFASTNESS

(2 PETER 3:17)

SAMUEL JOSEPH

The apostle Peter wrote his second epistle with a particular purpose filling his heart: to put his fellow Christians in remembrance. Two motivating factors, mentioned in the epistle, lie behind this purpose. The first is Peter's recognition of his own *imminent departure* from this earthly life (1:13–14). The second is the *imminent danger* posed to the believers by false teachers (2:1–2), who would soon come on the scene, increasing in prominence and popularity.

The latter is what lies behind the solemn warning with which Peter concludes his final epistle—“Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know *these things* before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness” (3:17). Out of sincere love and concern for his brethren, whom he calls his “beloved”, he writes to warn them lest they should “fall from [their] own stedfastness”. This is God's inspired warning to all of us today, as well. In this short exhortation, we shall look at the *deposit* that has been entrusted to us, and be reminded of the *duty* we have concerning it, as well as be alerted to the *danger* we face from the enemy.



The Deposit

In penning these opening words of his warning, “Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before”, the apostle Peter points his readers to what has already been said. Throughout the second and third chapters of his second epistle, Peter has been informing us about the presence of false teachers (2:1), as well as their character and methods, and the judgment that impends on them and all who follow them (2:1–22). Furthermore, he has told us about the scoffers that will come in the last days (3:1–3), the theme of their scorn (3:4), and the rightful response to their error (3:5–16).

This information is not mere fodder for idle curiosity and speculation; it is not something to be held loosely or with disinterest. We ought to view it as a sacred *deposit* that has been entrusted to us. It is part of the “more sure word of prophecy” to which Peter directs his readers, and in which he places more sure confidence than even his own specially endowed experience (1:18–19). It doesn’t matter that the apostle himself was about to leave this world, for in the inspired Word we have a permanent record of these predictions.

We know that false teachers will arise in the church, and that they will attempt to bring in heretical doctrines which detract from the glory and prerogatives of the Lord Jesus Christ. We know that they will succeed to a large extent, for many will follow their pernicious ways. We know that they will be motivated by greed and covetousness, to the extent that they will seek to exploit new believers, especially through the lusts of the

flesh. We know, for sure, that they—and all who follow them—will face the certain judgment of God.

We further know that scoffers will rise up in the world, calling into question both the historical and the prophetic record of the Scriptures. Theirs being a willing “ignorance”, we know that they have no excuse whatsoever. We also know, contrary to all their mocking claims, the certainty and finality of God’s fiery judgment which is to come. Brethren, we know a great deal! And we (the “beloved”) “know these things before”—because of the perfect record of Scripture.

We “know these things before” because of the perfect record of Scripture.

Our Duty

Yet with this knowledge comes a great responsibility. To be forewarned is to be forearmed, as the saying goes. The truth revealed to us in Scripture carries with it not an excuse for complacency, but all the more a *duty* of watchfulness. To be forgetful of biblical truths leads to a foregone conclusion: we become distracted—and to be distracted is to be disarmed!

Hence we find the apostle Peter reminding us that, since we “know these things before”, we must “beware”. The word “beware” carries the sense of keeping watch, or being on guard. Christians, knowing the impending danger of falsehood and error, must be actively on their guard. Just as a householder, if informed that thieves are coming that very night, he will hardly allow himself to fall asleep. Or just as sentries on the front lines, if warned that the enemy is massing for the attack, they will surely be roused out of any semblance of slumber.

It may be that in issuing this warning, the apostle Peter was mindful of his own example of dismal failure, on the night that the Lord Jesus was betrayed and arrested. We read how he had boasted of his own “stedfastness”, as it were, proclaiming to the Lord, “If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise” (Mark 14:31). He had vehemently disregarded the Lord’s prediction that “before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice” (Mark 14:30). In the garden, he neglected to pray, and allowed tiredness to overtake him, though the Lord graciously and pointedly asked, “Simon, sleepest thou?” (Mark 14:37b). A scant few hours later, he denied the Lord three times!

Ah, how bitterly he wept that night! He had been forewarned! But he had not taken the warning seriously; he had not been watchful. He had fallen into a grievous sin, and though his heart was sorely grieved, what he had done could not be undone. Yet the Lord graciously restored him. And now, with Scriptural hindsight, as for us, lest we should fall and weep also, Peter tells us to “beware”. Beware!

The word “beware” carries the sense of keeping watch, or being on guard ... knowing the impending danger of falsehood and error.

The Danger

When he warns us about the potential *danger* of “falling from [our] own stedfastness”, the apostle Peter is not speaking of losing our salvation. We know from Scripture that this is impossible: nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ (cf. Romans 8:39). But we can be shaken from our seemingly firm trust in the Lord, and provoked to deny Him. We can be led away from the truths of Scripture, to embrace doctrinal errors and believe in pernicious lies. Once again, we need only consider the apostle’s own (previously complacent, self-assured) example to see what a real danger this is to those, even genuine believers, who are not on their guard.

The fact is that, though we may think highly of our spiritual “stedfastness”, we are weak and in constant danger of falling. It is all too easy for us to be “led away with the error of the wicked”. It is all too easy for us to “fall” from that position which we thought to be secure. How sad (and how frightening) it is then to see Christians drowse

themselves with the world, and drown their senses in its sensual entertainments! What tragedy—and a foreboding of spiritual disaster—when we would rather watch ten hours of the world on our screens, than watch one hour for our souls in prayer!

Dear Christian, do you hear the Lord speaking to you, gently and yet urgently: “sleepest thou? couldst not thou watch one hour?” (Mark 14:37b). Dare you continue to be ignorant of the seriousness of your situation? You stand at the front lines of (spiritual) battle—against an old and wily foe, “that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world” (Revelation 12:9). You are warned as to his tactics, warned as to his agents, warned as to his aims and purposes. You have been warned, also, as to your own weakness! Spiritual vigilance is

not an option in this constant battle. There is no other way to keep from falling from your own steadfastness than to “Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation” (Mark 14:38a).

Conclusion

Truly, God is indeed “able to keep you from falling” (Jude 24)—but we have a responsibility also to make diligent use of the means of grace that God has provided. Thus, be watchful and prayerful, delighting ourselves in the law of God, and meditating on it day and night. That way, as the apostle Peter adds (via an encouraging affirmation) to his concluding admonition, instead of “falling,” we shall “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever” (2 Peter 3:18). Amen. ■

365 DAILY EXHORTATIONS

We praise the LORD that Pastor Prabhudas Koshy’s “365 Daily Exhortations from God’s Word” has been translated into Chinese.

Please pray for the BWMM staff as they labour to get this devotional ready for distribution by 2021.



HUDSON TAYLOR (1832-1905) PART IV

**RETOLD BY JENNY LOK
ILLUSTRATED BY ANDRONICUS KOSHY**

Retold from:

- “To China With Love” by Hudson Taylor, published by Dimension Books, Bethany Fellowship, Inc., Minneapolis, Minnesota, the United States
- “Hudson Taylor—God’s Man in China” by Dr & Mrs Howard Taylor, published by Moody Press, Chicago, Illinois, the United States
- “Hudson Taylor and Maria, Pioneers in China” by J. C. Pollock, published by Kingsway Publications Ltd, the United Kingdom
- “God’s Adventurer” by Phyllis Thompson, published by Overseas Missionary Fellowship (IHQ) Ltd, Singapore

In London, Hudson was slowly recovering from his ill health, thanks to his uncle Benjamin who never failed to provide him with good, nutritious meals daily. Despite this, he was worried that his parents might know of his condition and immediately rush to London to bring him home. That would mean he might lose another opportunity to see God’s mighty working in his life, especially at a time when his funds were very low. He prayed about the matter, and finally decided to appeal to his uncle and cousin not to inform his parents about his frail condition. They promptly cooperated, and Hudson was much relieved.

After weeks of pain and suffering, Hudson gradually regained some strength. Though still weak and easily tired, Hudson managed to make his way downstairs to the living room of his apartment. The doctor, who came by for a short visit, was pleasantly surprised by Hudson’s ability to walk. “Now,” he said, “the best thing you can do is to get off to the country as soon as you feel fit to make the journey. You may rest till you have gained more strength. Do not start work too soon, for the outcome may be serious.” Hudson thought to himself, “How I wish I could really be back in my warm and cosy home in Yorkshire! But I have no money.” Despite his need for funds, Hudson never gave any hint to the doctor about it. When he was alone again, Hudson prayed fervently for God’s guidance as to the next step of action.

The Lord once again directed him to go to the shipping office, where he previously wanted to collect his former landlady’s husband’s wages to pay himself

for the money that he had lent her to settle her rental. Hudson remembered how he was told by the shipping office that the particular seaman had gone to the “gold diggings” and, as a result, he could not get a single cent. For a while, he was uncertain if he should obey the inner prompting. He continued to pray and was convinced without a shadow of doubt, that God was leading him in this matter.

However, Hudson began to wonder, “How am I to go?” It was going to be a long walk to Cheapside where the shipping office was. Would he be able to survive a long journey of at least 2 miles? Hudson immediately looked to God and prayed, “O Lord, I am willing to make the trip. Only give me the strength to do it, please. In the name of Jesus, Amen!” With the help of the servant, Hudson put on his hat, took his walking stick and slowly made his way downstairs to begin his walk. It was really tough, just as he had imagined it to be. Every now and then, Hudson stopped by the shop windows along the way to catch his breath. After a toilsome journey, going down the street and then walking uphill again, Hudson finally reached Cheapside. He was so exhausted that he just plonked himself down on the steps leading to the shipping office. There were many curious stares and glances at this frail and pale-looking young man who sat on the stairs, with his



hands clasped and head bowed. Hudson thanked God for seeing him through a difficult journey, and after a short rest, he was ready to meet the clerk whom he had talked to previously.

“What happened to you, dear Sir? I am really glad you came. There had been a mistake. The seaman whom you mentioned did not run off to the gold diggings. It was actually another of the same name who ran away! I am really sorry. I’ll give you the half-pay due to the wife of the mate who is still on board.”

Before handing over the money, the clerk invited Hudson to share his lunch. Hudson was only too grateful to accept it as he was both tired and famished. How he thanked God for such a timely provision! Now that he could “reimburse” himself for having helped his previous landlady with his own money, Hudson felt happy to take an omnibus back to his lodging. He rejoiced in God’s unfailing love and care once again.

The very next morning, Hudson was in good spirits as he had recovered much from his illness. His first thought was to pay a visit to the good surgeon who had attended to him during his sickness. He reached the surgery clinic and was prepared to settle the medical bill when the kind doctor spoke to him.

“Well, Hudson, I know that you are still doing your medical course. So I’ve decided to waive all the fees. However, if you really insist on paying for something, perhaps you can have the prescribed quinine for 8 shillings.”

Hudson’s heart was overwhelmed by the doctor’s gracious gesture. He knew it was the working of the Heavenly Father. How he wished this good surgeon would come to the saving grace of God! The surgeon had been an unbeliever for years, and Hudson wanted so much to tell him of God’s marvellous work in his life. How glad he was when the surgeon agreed to hear him out. Nodding politely to Hudson, the doctor waited patiently for him to begin.

“Good doctor, I came to London without much money but simply trusting in God’s provisions. God has never failed me. My uncle in London came to my aid and I have a place to stay. I live simply on bread and water daily. However, yesterday, I found that I had hardly any money left and so I decided to walk to Cheapside to see if I could collect some money from the shipping clerk...”

At this point, the doctor’s eyes widened.

“Impossible! Why, I left you lying on the sofa looking more like a ghost than a man!”

Hudson assured him that God had given him all the strength and grace he asked for to make the journey.

“Do you mean you walked—you did not even go by omnibus?”

“Yes, I walked.”

“All the way from Soho to Farringdon Street, and then up Snow Hill to Cheapside...?”

“Yes, sir...”

Map of London 1807



The doctor was all ears now. Hudson continued to explain how he managed to collect the money and pay himself for the amount he had loaned to his previous landlady because of an urgent need. Having set aside some money to settle his bills, he had just enough to pay for the quinine and take a bus ride home. Hudson’s trust in a faithful God was written all over his face. His smile and sparkling eyes throughout his speech revealed the tremendous joy in his heart. The doctor was so moved that he broke down in tears.

“I would give all the world for a faith like yours,” he said in a choked voice.

“You can have it, sir, if you give your life to Christ. You can’t buy it with money for it is priceless!”

Two days later, as planned, Hudson was back home in the Yorkshire town of Barnsley for a short period of convalescence. How wonderful it was to be among friendly and familiar folks once again! Hudson felt so happy and contented as he gazed upon the loving faces of his parents, seated by the fire-side. It had been such a long time since he last enjoyed such close company. Home was indeed the best place to rest and recover from his recent illness.

Weeks flew by and it was time to return to London to continue his medical studies. Hudson knew that once again he had to adjust to the loneliness in London, without his family and friends who had made his days at Barnsley so joyful and memorable. Yet, there was no turning back! To serve the Lord in China had been his long-cherished desire and calling, and he could not let his mind stray to any other path. After all, missionary work requires men who trust fully in God’s strength and provisions. Hudson must indeed rise to the call!

Back in London, 6 months after, Hudson became an assistant to a certain surgeon. This time, he was able to stay with the surgeon and his family. Every day in the morning, Hudson would be busy with his medical studies in the hospital; in the evening, he would work for his surgeon employer till 9 o’clock. Right after that, it was back to his room for some self-study. To Hudson, it was sheer hard work, but he did not mind at all. In fact, he was so grateful to the Lord for providing him with such cosy lodging and, most certainly, food that was far better than his previous diet of apples and brown bread!

As the months went by, Hudson continued diligently in his medical studies, and performed ward duties to care for patients. For him, the sweetest relief was always on Sunday, a day of wonderful fellowship with Christian friends. Besides, soul-winning was always on his mind and he would be ready to say a word for Christ any time. A golden opportunity did come knocking at his door.

(To be continued)



J. Hudson Taylor.

BIBLE TRIVIA — NUMBERS 20

SARAH YONG

Read through Numbers 20. Then fill in each blank in the passage below with the correct answer, according to the respective verses given in the brackets.

The children of Israel came to the desert of Zin and abode in Kadesh; there Miriam died and was 1) _____ (v. 1). When they could not find any water, they questioned why the LORD had led them into this 2) _____ (v. 4). Moses and Aaron fell upon their faces and they sought the LORD. The LORD instructed them to 3) _____ (v. 8) unto the rock before the congregation; and it would give forth water! Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together, as told. However, in his anger, Moses lifted up his rod and 4) _____ (v. 11) the rock twice. Water came out abundantly, and the people drank, and their animals too. This is called the water of 5) _____ (v. 13), because the children of Israel strove with the LORD, and He was sanctified in them.

When they were unable to pass through Edom, the people journeyed and came unto Mount Hor. The LORD instructed Moses to take Aaron and his son Eleazar up unto Mount Hor. Moses then took the priestly 6) _____ (v. 26) from Aaron, and placed them upon Eleazar, as the LORD had 7) _____ (v. 27). Aaron died there in the mountaintop, and the congregation 8) _____ (v. 29) for Aaron 30 days. All this happened in the 40th year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt (cf. Numbers 33:38).

A Lesson to Note!

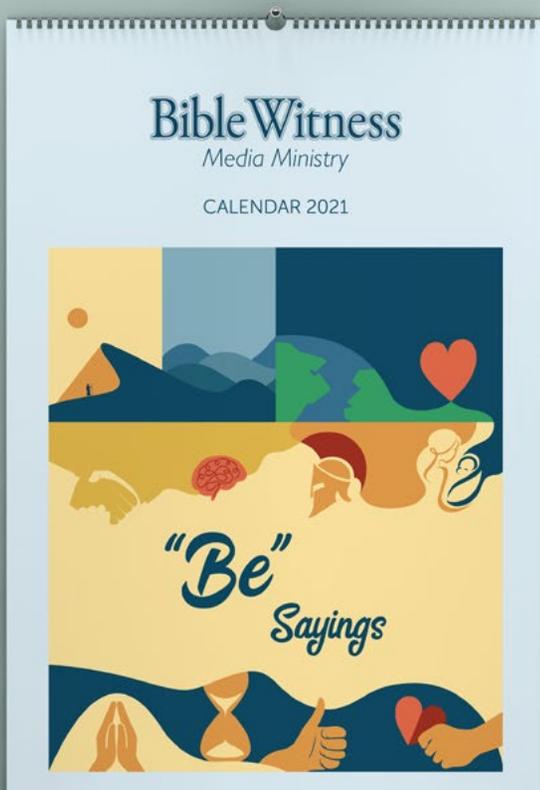
Use the red, boxed letter from each of the respective answers above (corresponding to its number) to complete the message here.

We should always seek the Lord and His Word, obeying His commandments happily. Because Moses' action and words were borne out of provoked anger, and not as God had instructed him, he failed to sanctify God in the eyes of the children of Israel. As such, Moses and Aaron would not be permitted to enter the Promised Land. We must beware, or else God will likewise punish us for our

_____.
1 2 3 4 5 6 1 2 6 8 7 6

Answers to Bible Trivia—Numbers 17 (Vol. 20, Iss. 4, p. 31)

- 1) twelve, 2) fathers, 3) rod, 4) blossom,
5) tabernacle, 6) house, 7) almonds, 8) token



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