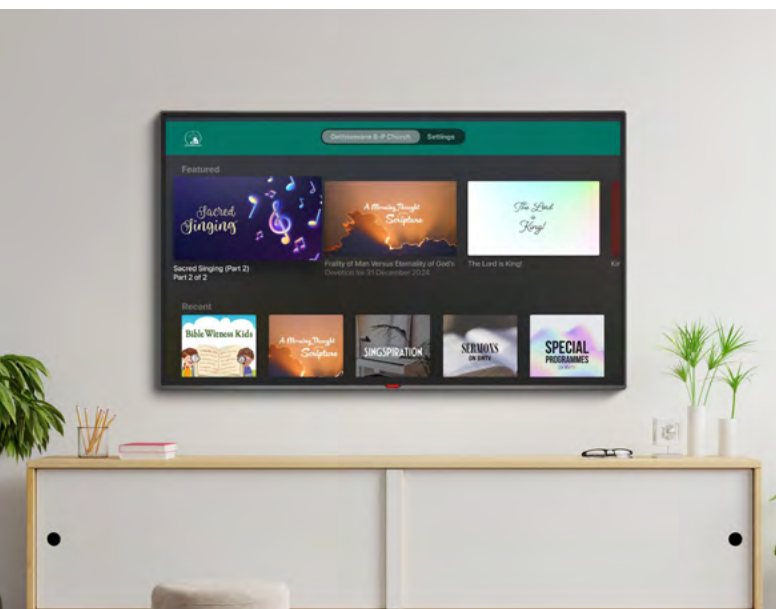


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HEAVENLY COUNSELS
FOR GODLY LIVING (PART 2)



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On the Cover ▲

"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses ... and let us run with patience the race that is set before us".
—Hebrews 12:1



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GIRD UP THE LOINS OF YOUR MIND!

1 Peter 1:13a

The Bible says, “For as he thinketh in his heart (or mind), so is he” (Proverbs 23:7a). Thus, we are to “keep [our] heart (i.e. mind) with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Proverbs 4:23). The Bible is spot on in identifying the mind (or heart) as the great preparatory ground from which spring forth our acts and actions. For “out of the good treasure of the heart”, a good man “bringeth forth good things” (Matthew 12:35a). Conversely, “out of the evil treasure” of the heart, an evil man “bringeth forth evil things” (Matthew 12:35b). Hence, the apostle Peter urges Christians to “**gird up the loins of your mind**” (1 Peter 1:13a).

What does it mean to “gird up the loins of your mind”? This figure or analogy is taken from the custom of the Oriental nations, in reference to the flowing robes worn by the Orientals. Though elegant-looking, these flapping robes can become serious hindrances to quick and exertive movements—as they may wrap around the wearer’s legs. The wearer therefore lays hold of the entangling garments and tucks them into a girdle (or belt). He gathers the loose garments and binds them into a compact bundle firmly about the waist or loins. Then, and only then, may he feel free to walk briskly or run (without getting tripped), and make progress in his physical movement—hence the expression “gird up the loins”.

GODLY LIVING BEGINS WITH THE MIND

Likewise in the spiritual realm, we need to be free (from the entanglement of sin) to run the Christian race unhindered, “lay[ing] aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, ... looking

unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:1b–2). When applied to the mind, this expression, “gird up the loins”, speaks of the thoughts of the mind being harnessed and kept under self-control. In a word, Peter is saying that godly living begins with the mind. Not surprisingly, this expression is tied closely to the injunction, “be sober” (1 Peter 1:13b), which immediately follows this expression. Soberness has to do with the state of mind. The Greek root verb means “to keep safe the mind”; it has the idea of guarding one’s mind from impurity and falsehood. And that requires diligence, vigilance and alertness of mind, with the accompanying refraining from indulgence in purposeless or aimless aspirations and sensual, wild imaginations.

We cannot let our minds drift into loose thinking or idle musing. Just as a loose garment can trip a man up and cause him to stumble, so is loose thinking equally dangerous in potentially leading one to moral entanglement. We do well to gather our thoughts and “bind” (i.e. focus) them around God’s Word which, when meditated upon, is the cleansing instrument that keeps us from falling into moral entanglement. As we swim against the tide of this corrupt world and be not conformed to it, may we be “transformed by the renewing of [our] mind (through God’s Word), that [we] may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Romans 12:2). Indeed, “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word” (Psalm 119:9). Moreover, as we allow ourselves to be “cleanse[d] ... with the washing of water by the

word” (Ephesians 5:26), we shall experience another precious spiritual truth: “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee (God)” (Psalm 119:11).

DISCIPLINED THOUGHT-LIFE: KEY TO GODLY LIVING

Undeniably, an ill-disciplined mind is perhaps the greatest hindrance to personal purity. How often the terrible sins of the flesh originate in the mind! Satan uses all he can in the environment and the internet to stir up an evil, impure mind in us. The way to conquer an unclean mind is by “girding up the loins of your mind”.

In practical terms, there is something negative we must refrain from, and something positive to embrace. Be selective in your reading, social media viewing and internet access. Avoid looking at suggestive magazines, posters and other displays. Cinemas are out. Why subject yourself to undue temptation and undesirable influence, if you can help it? Rather, take heed of and exert yourself to the various means of grace. By engaging in worship services, prayer gatherings, Bible studies, fellowship meetings, Bible camps and retreats and the like, we fill our minds with godly thoughts and high resolve through “the washing of water by the word” (Ephesians 5:26). That’s one way we “gird up the loins of [our] mind”. The Christian who guards this area well is on a firm footing towards victory already, insofar as purity of life is concerned.

Dear brethren, we are to beware of loose thinking and mental slothfulness. Rather, we are to aim for spiritual

alertness. Put some strenuousness and discipline into your mind. “Set your affection on things above” (Colossians 3:2a). Steer your thoughts and guide them into godly things. Delight thyself “in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth ... meditate day and night” (Psalm 1:2). To put it in biblical language, “whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Philippians 4:8). That’s how you “gird up the loins of your mind”.

CONCLUSION

This heavenly counsel is paramount in the nurture of holiness in our life. It paves the way for us to be “as obedient children, not fashioning [ourselves] according to the former lusts in [our] ignorance: but as he which hath called [us] is holy, so be [we] holy in all manner of conversation” (1 Peter 1:14–15). ■



REMEMBER TO REMEMBER!

2 Peter 1:12–15

“**W**herefore I will not be negligent to put you always in **remembrance** of these things, ... to stir you up by putting you in **remembrance**; ... that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in **remembrance**” (2 Peter 1:12–15).

In this short portion of Scripture, one word stands out by virtue of its repetition. Three times the word “remembrance” is used by the apostle Peter here in his second and last epistle. Evidently, Peter is taking pains here to remind the believers of the spiritual truths they

had been taught. They were not to be mere casual, disinterested hearers of God's truths. They were to constantly review, recall, and even renew their convictions concerning them.

For sure, Peter had taught the believers many things in the various churches that he had helped set up and ministered to throughout the regions (cf. 1 Peter 1:1) in his Gospel ministry all those years. These are not only Gospel truths leading to salvation, but also spiritual truths instrumental to their spiritual growth and maturity. Peter, as a spiritual father, felt responsible and most burdened to exhort the believers to continually embrace these spiritual truths that had been imparted to them. Concerned that these do not become mere head knowledge detached from their practical Christian living, he is now putting them in remembrance of these same good old truths!

In our text, in each of the three occurrences, the Greek word for "remembrance" is derived from the same root verb (*mimnēskō*), which means "to recall to mind". The threefold usage of the derivative Greek word (translated as "remembrance")—some of which are expressed in intensive form (*which has the effect of enhancing the meaning of the word*), making the action or condition more emphatic—therefore denotes not a one-time action, but an ongoing, continual, repeated reminder. A sense of urgency is also invoked!

WHY THE PRESSING NEED TO REMEMBER?

Apparently, within some of the local churches (that Peter was addressing), believers were faced with false

teachings arising from liberal teachers working within the church. "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, ... (and) by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of" (2 Peter 2:1–2). False, deceptive teachers not only are rife in our time; they already existed in Peter's day. And as the saying goes, "The worst enemy is that within the camp!"

Unfortunately, in Peter's day, false teachings had been making the rounds that since believers are saved by grace through faith, it didn't matter how they lived their Christian life, or how they built on the foundation of faith in Christ. Peter could see the pernicious mischief and potential subversion of faith caused by those liberal teachers. It was his bounden duty to counter this treacherous danger and stem the inroads made by those liberal, false teachers before they became deeply entrenched in the churches. Peter wanted to put the believers in remembrance of what he had taught them, that they may be rooted and established in their unfeigned faith.

In order to reject spiritual error, believers must be grounded in spiritual truths. To know what are false teachings behoves that believers know what are true teachings. That way, we'll be able to discern rightly.

WHAT TO CONTINUALLY REMEMBER?

The object of our remembrance, as Peter put it, is lumped under the phrase "these things" (vv. 12, 15). What are "these things"? These things evidently pertain

to our spiritual stability and fruitfulness (cf. vv. 8a, 9a, 10b). In the immediate context, "these things" would refer to the spiritual traits (hallmarks of a growing, flourishing Christian life) which Peter has enumerated in the earlier verses (vv. 5–7). We are to remember "these things"—which allude to our diligent cultivation of the aforementioned spiritual traits in particular, and to our taking heed of all the things Peter mentioned in his two epistles in general; and by extension, to the entire recorded Scriptures! "This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: that ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets (Old Testament), and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour (New Testament)" (2 Peter 3:1–2).

Remember, the Christian faith is a reasonable faith—not a mindless "blind leap of faith" apart from God's revealed Word. How can we then "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh [us] a reason of the hope that is in [us]" (1 Peter 3:15)? By being "mindful of the words" of the Scriptures in our explanation or expounding of spiritual truths. Ours is an explainable faith. And to be able to do so, we must increase in knowledge of God's Word—hence it is essential that we "add ... to virtue knowledge" (v. 5b).

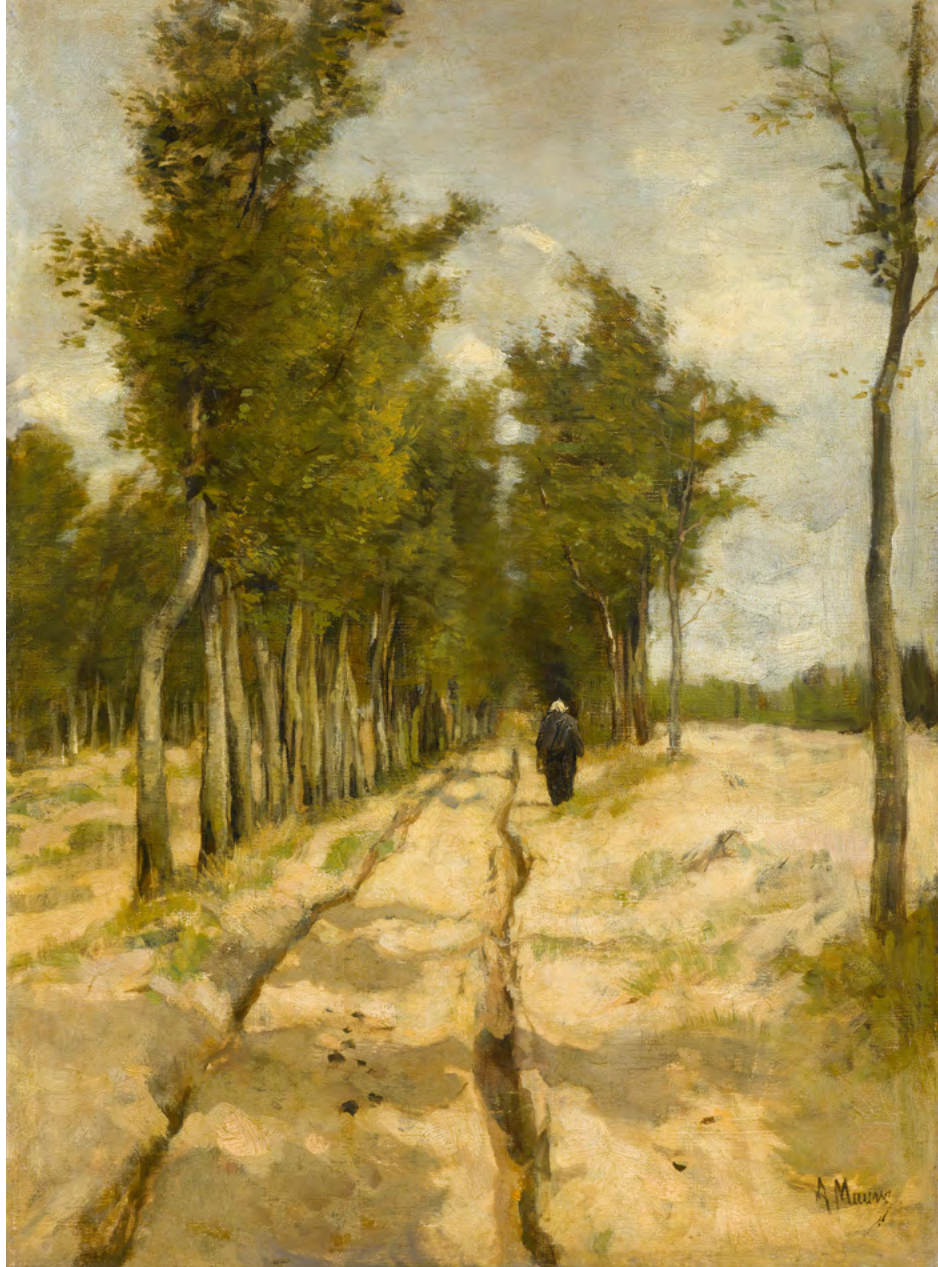
HOW TO REMEMBER DOWN THROUGH THE AGES?

Of note is Peter's mention of his impending death [*"my decease"* (v. 15)] by martyrdom (which Jesus had already prophesied in John 21:18–19a).

Though he left no stone unturned in unrelentingly reminding Christians of precious spiritual truths while he was alive, he knew he was mortal and his ministry on earth limited. He would soon have to leave the scene. Yet believers must still have a lasting avenue to be reminded of spiritual things. Believers must have access to a permanent reminder. For believers to have perpetual access to "these things" strongly points to a written record! That's why Peter wrote his epistles. And that's why he urged the believers to be mindful of other Scriptural records (cf. 2 Peter 3:1–2), including Paul's epistles (cf. 2 Peter 3:15–16).

Dear brethren, we now have in our hands the complete canon of Scripture, a permanent (*in fact, a "forever-settled"*!) record—this Bible of 66 Books—which is "a more sure word of prophecy" (v. 19a). "All scripture (which refer to the written record of God's Word) is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). Read Scripture to be wise; believe Scripture to be safe; remember and practise Scripture to be holy.

Dear brethren, we must guard against "spiritual amnesia". **Remember to remember** God's truths. Let Scripture fill our memory and rule our heart, that we may not be "led away with the error of the wicked, (nor) fall from [our] own steadfastness", but that we may "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:17–18). Amen. ■



WALK IN TRUTH!

2 John 2, 4a

“**F**or the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever ... I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children **walking in truth...**” (2 John 2, 4a).

John's second epistle touches on believers' fellowship with fellow saints. Certain words keep recurring in the epistle—“truth” (vv. 1a, 1b, 2, 3, 4); “commandment” (vv. 4, 5, 6a, 6b); “doctrine” (vv. 9a, 9b, 10)—which give hint as to the theme of the epistle. It seems to deal with the limit of that

fellowship. Believers are to relate with fellow Christians and show hospitality in a discerning manner, that is, within the confines of truth.

You could say, the apostle John was most obsessed with truth. After all, John is the one who wrote down Jesus' sublime statement about truth in John 8:32—“And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” Furthermore, in his Gospel account, he also mentioned of Jesus assuring His disciples that He “will pray the Father, and he shall give [them] another Comforter ... even the Spirit of truth” (John 14:16–17a); and that “when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide [them] into all truth” (John 16:13). And here in his second epistle, John is emphasising the importance of “walking in truth” (v. 4a).

TRUTH IS FOREVER

John begins by stating that his love for (and therefore dealings and fellowship with) the recipients of his epistle is “in the truth” (v. 1), and “for the truth's sake, which ... shall be with us **for ever**” (v. 2). In John's mind, truth is not transient, but timeless, i.e. it is “for ever”! What is truth in O.T. times is also truth in N.T. times (e.g. one man-one woman in the marriage relationship). What is truth in the pre-Flood era is also truth in the Church Age (e.g. seven-day week patterned after Creation Week). What is truth in the 1st Century is also truth in the 21st Century (e.g. salvation is by grace through faith in Christ alone). Truth is not a human notion or a proposition; neither is it dictated by tradition nor man-made rules, but based on God's unchanging Word—the Bible. Jesus has said to those who

believed on Him, “If ye **continue** in my word, ... ye shall know the truth” (John 8:31b–32a), implying that the truth as manifested in His Word is timeless.

Indeed, very few things are forever, “but the word of the Lord endureth for ever” (1 Peter 1:25a). By God's special providential keeping, no word will ever be lost. This is God's promise, which is unbreakable (Matthew 5:18). God's people throughout the ages (generation after generation) must have access to God's truths (as revealed through the Bible) to be their rule of life (Psalm 12:6–7; cf. Matthew 4:4).

This high view of the Bible can be easily accepted by logic of faith. You see, the Bible reveals to us the mind of the infinite, eternal, unchangeable God, whose ways are inscrutable and past finding out. “The secret things belong unto the LORD our God” (Deuteronomy 29:29a). But those things which God chose to reveal for our knowledge and understanding are recorded for us in the Scriptures. These “belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deuteronomy 29:29b). We thus recognise that in God's Word are contained precious doctrines and truths which shall stand us in good stead, and make us wise and well-prepared for all our challenges in life. We therefore do well to give primacy to God's Word in all facets of our life—and make it the rule of faith and practice in our personal, social, family, and church life in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. Amid the pervasive compromise of God's Word to fit the ever-changing claims of science, academia and many humanistic authorities in secular society, may we remember: Truth is unchanging. “For

ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven” (Psalm 119:89)!

Hence, John sets the boundary right at the outset. Everything we do, including our interactions and relationships, must be within the domain of truth—“for the truth’s sake”. Simply because truth is not fickle or transient, but “for ever”!

TRUTH RESULTS IN CONTINUAL SPIRITUAL GROWTH

True to his love for the truth, John exclaims in v. 4a, “I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy (*the elect lady’s*) children **walking in truth**”. Adherence to the truth will not stop at mere head-knowledge; it is evidenced by continual spiritual growth in the believer’s life. Christian faith cannot be separated from Christian practice—beware of the “professing-Christian” syndrome! In modern-day Christianity, however, many churchgoers woefully live and act with no evidence of spiritual growth or righteous conduct. While many among the modern Christian “crowd” love to associate with the church, they are not willing to abandon their worldly ways and walk in the newness of the Spirit, resulting in the increasingly entrenched declension in the spiritual state of affairs in many churches today.

The Christian life is a life of spiritual discipline—like what John found of this elect lady’s children whose lives manifested a “walking in truth”. Walking depicts ongoing movement, signifying progression. The Greek word translated as “walking” is in the form of a perfect participle, which indicates an event that is started in the past, with results still felt in the present. Hence, there ought to be ongoing progression in our spiritual life

from the time we become regenerated. Though it’ll not be an easy road, there is noticeable, continual “grow[ing] in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18a).

To the apostle John, there is no such thing as “easy-believism”. Faith without works (i.e. faith without a “walking in truth”) is dead, the Bible warns us! In fact, the language and teachings of the Bible allude to exertion on our part in the nurture of Christian character and spiritual growth. Note a few examples as follows:

- “**Study** to shew thyself approved unto God...” (2 Timothy 2:15);
- “Take heed ... unto the doctrine; **continue** in them...” (1 Timothy 4:16);
- “**Fight** the good fight of faith...” (1 Timothy 6:12);
- “**Put on** the whole armour of God...” (Ephesians 6:11);
- “As we have therefore opportunity, let us **do good** unto all men...” (Galatians 6:10);
- “... let us **run** with patience the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1b).

Dear brethren, if you “study”, “continue”, “fight”, “put on”, “do good”, “run”, etc., you’ll surely grow continually and flourish, and become spiritually steadfast. That’s how you **walk in truth**. No wonder the apostle John “rejoiced greatly” to find believers walking in truth. May you do the same and likewise be a cause of great rejoicing for your pastors and elders, and all those “that have the rule over you”. So much so that they, in their watching for your souls, may “give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief” (Hebrews 13:17). ■



LET YOUR MODERATION PREVAIL!

Philippians 4:5

“**L**et your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand” (Philippians 4:5).

The above text is part of Paul’s admonition in his epistle written to the Philippian church. Now, the church in Philippi occupied an important place in Paul’s heart. After all, it was the first church he had established in continental Europe, following his Macedonian call (cf. Acts 16:8–12) during his second missionary journey.

It was there that he and his missionary team received timely hospitality from Lydia’s household, resulting in a church flourishing right in her house (cf. Acts 16:14–15, 40). Establishing a ministry in Philippi in turn served as a “launching pad” for Paul’s Gospel forays into Thessalonica, Berea, and other parts of Macedonia and Achaia. The church in Philippi was considered by Paul to be his

most missions-supportive church, as acknowledged by Paul when he said that “no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only” (Philippians 4:15; cf. 4:10, 14, 16). It was a God-honouring, generous church, full of evangelistic fervour, abounding in the Lord’s work.

A BESETTING VULNERABILITY IN THE CHURCH

But apparently, a besetting vulnerability existed in this beloved church. There seemed to be a lack of like-mindedness among the brethren. Paul was made aware of some ongoing dissension, which hinted at slight disagreements here and there in the church. Wanting to nip it in the bud, Paul felt the need to highlight and address this vulnerability with several well-placed admonitions in this largely commendational letter:

- Philippians 2:2—“Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind”;
- Philippians 2:3—“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves”;
- Philippians 2:14—“Do all things without murmurings and disputings”;
- Philippians 3:15—“Let us therefore ... be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you”;
- Philippians 4:2—“I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord”.

It culminated in Paul’s call for “**moderation**” to prevail—“Let your moderation be known unto all men”

(Philippians 4:5). Now, the Greek word (*epieikēs*) for “moderation” is elsewhere in the New Testament translated as “patient” (1 Timothy 3:3), and “gentle” (Titus 3:2; James 3:17). It has the idea of “forbearance”, having a calm but fair approach to dealing with difficult people or situations. It describes a person as easy to be intreated, not asserting one’s right nor having a domineering disposition, but one who shows magnanimity and graciousness.

This spirit of moderation is most needful because of two crucial reasons. Firstly, it is needful for keeping the unity of the Spirit within the body of Christ. Secondly, it is needful for bearing good testimony in the light of Christ’s soon return.

KEEPING THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

Christians are to guard against the disruption of harmony in the fellowship of the church. We are all aware that it takes much effort and toil to build up the fellowship of a church, but it will take very little to instil resentment or disunity of spirit among its members, brought on by an overbearing spirit, or a lack of moderation. Now, the apostle Paul knew it is impossible for all in the church to be alike in opinion and approach in all practical or personal matters (they being from all sorts of backgrounds). Thus, having a spirit of moderation is most crucial in maintaining peace and harmony, and in resolving conflicts and differences of personal opinions arising from time to time in the church. Hence his admonition in Philippians 4:5, which is a subtle appeal for like-mindedness within the church.

Paul is not talking about doctrine here, but mundane, practical aspects of day-to-day living and interactions. We need not look far for Paul’s point to be vividly driven home. He highlighted an episode pertaining a potentially damaging conflict between two well-beloved sisters-in-Christ, namely Euodias and Syntyche (Philippians 4:2-3). That “they be of the same mind in the Lord”, they are urged to “let [their] moderation be known unto all men” (v. 5a). We see how Paul earnestly (and with utmost assurance in the Lord) applied this teaching by urging the church leaders to help bring about reconciliation between the two **in the spirit of moderation**, and thereby keep the unity of the Spirit. It goes without saying, any third party involved certainly need to have this spirit of moderation as well.

BEARING GOOD TESTIMONY REAPS REWARDS AT CHRIST’S RETURN

It is instructive to note that this exhortation for moderation is tied to the observation that “The Lord is at hand” (v. 5b). This would allude to Christ’s soon return to reward those who have faithfully served Him with a right spirit. Imagine losing your rewards upon His return because of your indiscreet reactions to your trying situations!

Christians are not to take matters into their own hands. We are to show great restraint even in the face of stubbornness or misunderstanding. This non-retaliatory stance must be the Christians’ response because “the Lord is at hand”. It must be characteristic of all our dealings with brethren—that speaks of forbearance. Admittedly,

there is a tendency to become impatient with having to deal with conflicts and tensions in relationships between brethren, which often wear everybody down. Be careful not to allow our reactions, in an unguarded moment, to degenerate into complaint against and irritability towards fellow brethren, or even lashing out in anguish at those we are supposed to help. Falling out with one another when under distress will mar our Christian testimony.

Certainly, it takes great control and moderation to take hold of ourselves and not utter “grievous words (which) stir up anger”, instead of “a soft answer (that) turneth away wrath” (Proverbs 15:1). It entails self-denial when you as “the servant of the Lord” refrain from striving, and instead “be gentle ... patient ... (unto) those that oppose themselves”, correcting them in meekness (2 Timothy 2:24-25). Indeed, “The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression” (Proverbs 19:11). Such bearing of good testimony will certainly reap rewards at Christ’s return. It will be worth it all when we see Christ and hear Him say, “Well done, thou good and faithful (and moderate) servant!” (cf. Matthew 25:21).

CONCLUSION

Moderation means self-control. While the world loses control, being unruly and full of strife, we remain sober, temperate, self-controlled—in short, moderate! Therefore, brethren, “**Let your moderation be known** unto all men. The Lord is at hand”! ■



REFRESH THE BOWELS OF THE SAINTS!

Philemon 5-7

Faith without works is dead, the Bible warns. True piety (loving God) must be accompanied by charity (loving fellow men), so that “by this shall all men know that ye are [Christ’s] disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35). The Christian faith is not an impersonal, unsympathetic faith, but one that can be moved with compassion by the needs of others.

LOVE HAS GOOD REPORT

Just like that of the character Philemon, whom the apostle Paul described as “dearly beloved” (v. 1), and whose “love and faith” was well-reported (v. 5) throughout the region and beyond, even right up to where

Paul was imprisoned (cf. vv. 9–10). Paul’s consequential prayer of thanks testifies to this: “I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers, hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and **toward all saints**” (vv. 4–5).

Clearly, Philemon’s faith in Christ was not lacking in good works, as evidenced in his love toward the brethren. Interestingly, the first preposition (*pros*) translated as “toward” in reference to “the Lord Jesus”, is a different Greek word from that (*eis*) translated as “toward” in reference to “all saints”. While the first gives the idea of motion toward its object (namely Christ), the second literally means “into”. This speaks of Philemon’s love as being transmitted, as it were, right into its recipients. It vividly expresses Philemon’s acts of love as entering into the hearts of his beneficiaries and touching their **innermost** being. Little wonder that Paul later uses the expression “bowels” (v. 7) to further drive home his point of how deeply touched and greatly moved the saints were!

LOVE IS RESPONSIVE

Philemon has a generous heart which feels and responds to others in dire straits. His responsive acts to the needs of troubled saints suffering lack or poverty are described by Paul as “the **communication** of [his] faith” (v. 6a). This interesting term is translated from the Greek word (*koinonia*) commonly rendered as “fellowship” or “sharing”. In other words, Philemon’s sharing of something tangible (as the context speaks of his Christian giving) is borne out of his responsive faith. This

responsive readiness is to be ongoing, and energised (“become effectual” [v. 6b]) by “the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus” (v. 6c). We thus must recognise that every blessing (physical and spiritual) we (and our family) have received comes from the Lord (cf. James 1:17). We are merely stewards of all our worldly goods and material possessions. So, may we, like Philemon, purpose in our hearts that, just as we have freely received from the Lord, so freely we ought to give in response to the needs of fellow saints who have fallen into hard times.

Indeed, Christian fellowship is best demonstrated by the maintenance of brotherly love through sharing and communicating of spiritual or material gifts. The early church was known for its sacrificial giving in response to the needy saints. The church at Antioch, in the face of a “great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar” (Acts 11:28b), has this commendation said of it in its response: “Then the disciples (in Antioch), every man according to his ability, determined to **send relief** unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul” (Acts 11:29–30). Another telling example is the responsive giving of the churches in Macedonia and Achaia, “for it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain **contribution for the poor saints** which are at Jerusalem” (Romans 15:26).

Truly, believers need to share their resources for the promotion of the Gospel work, as well as help needy brethren. As pointed out by the writer of Hebrews, “But to do good and to

communicate (which has the idea of imparting something tangible) forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (Hebrews 13:16). Such is the responsiveness of the love that shares!

LOVE IS REFRESHING

Being willing to help is one thing, but whether the other party truly benefits from our help is another. In Philemon’s case, it is both. For Paul had received reports of saints helped in no small way by him. He had derived “great joy and consolation in [his] love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by [him]” (v. 7). Now, the Greek word (*splagchna*) for “bowels” literally means “intestines”. This expression is usually used figuratively in the N.T. to signify the inward parts or deep innermost recesses of one’s being. To “refresh someone’s bowels” means to show outward manifestation of pity and participate in the sufferings of others—in other words, showing sympathy or compassion, causing the recipient(s) of such kindness to feel relieved and revitalised.

Though Paul himself did not directly benefit from Philemon’s magnanimity, he derived “great joy and consolation” from Philemon’s acts of charity toward the needy saints, which must have brought great relief and considerable refreshment (of body and spirit) to their lives. He rejoiced that other members of the body of Christ had been refreshed and blessed. Philemon’s refreshing ministry to others had brought cheer and uplift of spirit to Paul, even in such sombre moments as his imprisonment. You could say, being strengthened and encouraged by Philemon’s generosity, Paul’s “bowels ... are refreshed” as well!

Dear brethren, may our timely giving and sharing be impactful, like that of Philemon. Paul uses the perfect passive tense for the Greek verb for “refreshed”, which indicates the type of action as “past action with ongoing results”. That is to say, Philemon’s timely generosity made available to the saints was considerable and far-reaching. No mean physical relief was extended to those suffering great deprivation, resulting in considerable refreshment being made a reality in the needy saints’ lives.

CONCLUSION

Loving God does not just end there. It will naturally lead us to do good unto all men, especially to them who are of the household of faith, wherever opportunity or need arises. May our faith be a faith that is evidenced by a responsive love that will not neglect to “refresh the bowels of the saints”—to the praise of God’s glory! ■

BIBLE TRIVIA
JOSHUA 8

SARAH YONG

Answers to Bible Trivia
Joshua 7 (Vol. 25, Iss. 2,
pp. 30–31)

Part A: A1–B3, A2–B5,
A3–B1, A4–B7, A5–B2, A6–B6,
A7–B9, A8–B4, A9–B10,
A10–B11, A11–B8

Part B: “Thou shalt not covet”

A. Read the Bible passage in Joshua 8:1-30, and then complete each of the statements below with a suitable word taken from its corresponding verse.

- 1. The LORD told Joshua not to be _____. (v. 1)
- 2. He was to lay an _____ for the city of Ai. (v. 2)
- 3. 30,000 mighty men were to be despatched by Joshua during the _____. (v. 3)
- 4. They were to lie in wait and be all _____. (v. 4)
- 5. Joshua and those who were with him would _____ unto the city from the front. (v. 5)
- 6. The LORD would _____ the city into their hands. (v. 7)
- 7. They were to set the city on _____ after taking it. (v. 8)
- 8. To execute the battle plan, Joshua and the company of warriors with him pitched on the _____ side of the city of Ai. (v. 11)
- 9. At the same time, 5,000 men were to wait in hiding on the _____ side of the city. (v. 12)
- 10. Joshua then went by night into the midst of the _____ beside Ai. (v. 13)
- 11. When the king of Ai went after the Israelites, he did not know about the men hiding in ambush _____ the city. (v. 14)
- 12. The people of Ai left the city open, and _____ after Israel. (v. 17)
- 13. At the LORD’s command, Joshua stretched out the _____ in his hand. (v. 18)
- 14. When the city was captured and set on fire, smoke from the ruins ascended up to _____. (v. 20)
- 15. Joshua’s men killed all the pursuing men of Ai, but the king of Ai was taken _____, and brought to Joshua. (v. 23)
- 16. All in all, 12,000 people of Ai _____ that day. (v. 25)

- B. Each of the above 16 answers can be found in the word search to the right. Can you find and highlight them? [Hint: The first letter of each word is in bold red. It can be read horizontally (forward or backward), vertically or diagonally.]

- C. Cross out each of the 16 words upon finding them in the word search. The remaining unused letters in the word search will give a hidden message. Place these unused letters in order, on the blanks below, to reveal the answer to the given question.

What did Joshua do to worship God?

_____.

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

Wang Ming-Dao

(1900-1991) - Part VII

Retold by Jenny Lok
Layout & Art by Andronicus Koshy

Alas! Wang Ming-Dao's teaching stint (close to one and a half years) at the Presbyterian school in Baoding soon came to an abrupt halt.

He had to leave the school because he held a different view on the mode of baptism from the Presbyterian church, which had always followed the Biblical practice of baptism by sprinkling or pouring of water.

On 4 January 1921, the day before he left the school at Baoding, Wang Ming-Dao had a short conversation with the Principal, Mr Thomas Biggin.

Mr Biggin,
I have made up my mind to
go ahead with my baptism
by immersion, which
is my conviction.

Though I was previously
baptised when I first came to
believe in the Lord Jesus Christ,
this time, it has to be by
immersion.

This is terribly disappointing.

I would like very much to keep
you here but we need to protect our
students and the church from false
teachings, which come mainly from the
Pentecostal* groups in China.

My colleague,
whom you have expelled earlier, had
introduced me to Teacher Ju who has
agreed to baptise me. I'm going ahead
with my plan to follow him.

Be careful, Teacher Wang!

This Mr Ju comes
from a Pentecostal church in Peking.
He and others from his group have taught
many wrong doctrines, whether it be on
baptism or the work of
the Holy Spirit.

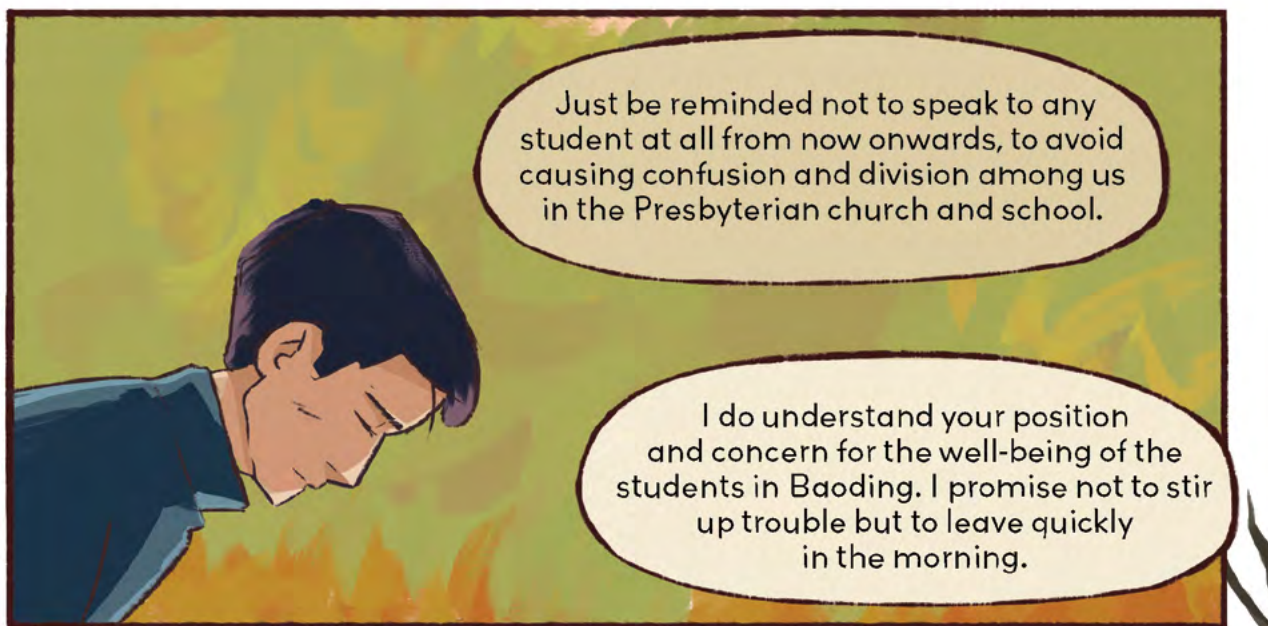
You are too rash
in your decision to
follow in their path!

Thank you, Mr Biggin,
for your warning.

But I'm quite sure he is a very
devout believer, for he has given up his
job as a coal merchant to be a
preacher of God's Word.

Well, I see that you're not
going to change your mind.
Anyway, take this bag of
coins to help you pay for
your trip home to Peking.

*movement that stresses on the presence of the Holy Spirit seen in tongue-speaking, healing, etc.



Just be reminded not to speak to any student at all from now onwards, to avoid causing confusion and division among us in the Presbyterian church and school.

I do understand your position and concern for the well-being of the students in Baoding. I promise not to stir up trouble but to leave quickly in the morning.

Wang's baptism took place on 6 January, two days after the conversation he had with the Principal at Baoding.

He was not alone! Five students from the school at Baoding had left together with him, despite the Principal's warning. They too participated in the baptism.

It was snowing, and Wang, as well as the students, had to endure the freezing water in a small pool below a bridge over the river, towards the south of the city.



In the midst of this, Wang's heart was constantly filled with doubts and fears, and his mind was also in turmoil.

Shortly after, Wang and the five students had a brief meeting with Mr Ju, who tried desperately to make them speak in "tongues".

Mr Ju taught that the ability to speak in "tongues" was a sign of having received the Holy Spirit. To Mr Ju's chagrin, all that Wang managed to utter was some "incomprehensible sounds".



Despite that, Mr Ju congratulated Wang,

Well done! Mr Wang, you've spoken in tongues! You've received the Holy Spirit!

This cannot be of the Holy Spirit! The Holy Spirit does not work through such strange and confusing sounds. Clearly, it was on 21 November 1920 that my life was significantly changed. I was acutely aware of my sins, especially that of pride. Since then, I felt a distinct change in my life. That was the day I was filled with the Holy Spirit!"



It dawned on Wang Ming-Dao that Mr Ju not only deceived himself, but also misled others into believing in false teachings.

Three days later, Wang Ming-Dao began his journey home.

Oh, I cannot wait to reach home!
I'm certain Ma and Jie will be happy to receive me
with welcoming arms!

Wang's troubled spirit was much lifted by the thought of seeing his family again.
As expected, Wang's mother and sister were delighted to see him, but the joy on
their faces faded away when they heard the reason for his return to Peking.



Wang's sister, who had just
returned from teaching in school,
heard of what happened and
expressed her displeasure.

Brother, you should
not have done that!
You are a fool!

Wang Ming-Dao was deeply troubled indeed! There was not a tinge of sympathy
but hostility in the reaction of almost everyone around him
— his family, friends and neighbours.

Oh God,
how can I face this crisis
in my life. It's hard to serve
Thee when all around me
talk ill of me, and even
suggest that I am mentally
unsound! Please deliver
me, dear Lord Jesus!

God did not fail Wang,
for He led him to read
1 Corinthians 10:13:

**"There hath no temptation taken you
but such as is common to man: but
God is faithful, who will not suffer
you to be tempted above that ye are
able; but will with the temptation
also make a way to escape, that ye
may be able to bear it."**

What amazing comfort and strength Wang Ming-Dao had received
through the wonderful and assuring words of God!



Henceforth, Wang was led to an intensive study of God's Word.
Alone, in a room (his "little hut" or "Converted Greenhouse" within the courtyard
of his home, previously used for holding plants), Wang spent
hours and hours in Bible reading, prayer and fasting.

Suddenly, Wang Ming-Dao felt a new awakening to the truths of God's Word.
With a heart of thanksgiving, Wang bowed before God and prayed,

Almighty Lord and King! Indeed, Thou art the Giver
of everlasting life to those who believe in Thee and trust in Thy saving
grace. Thou had risen from the dead and therefore gained victory over
death! 'O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?'
(1 Corinthians 15:55). Thank you, Lord, for saving my soul, and now
I'm completely free from the fear of death!
In Jesus' most glorious name,
Amen!

In giving himself fully to the study of God's Word, Wang Ming-Dao had this to say about his experience:

Some of God's promises are written as it were with invisible ink.

It is only when they are placed in the flame of suffering that they become manifest.

Truly, God's promises became so clear to Wang in the midst of extreme trials.

Much humbled by God's chastening, Wang Ming-Dao declared:

Now, I see that the fame and glory of this world are nothing but vanity.

I may not have the opportunity to study in a theological college, but God Himself did surely teach and train me in His great and mighty truths.

No longer will I pursue a university education and theological training in China and England. Instead, I pray that God will grant me the diligence to spend all my time reading through the Bible.

One day, Wang's cousin visited him and urged him,

Cousin, come and stay with me at my home.

At your home, in the village of Da-yu, outside the city wall of Yi-ho-yuen?

Yes, there you can look forward to a quiet village life. Besides, the mountain of "Ten Thousand Lives" is nearby. Believe me, it's an opportunity to simply relax and behold the breathtaking mountains and the ever flowing crystal clear water in the rivers.

Thank you so much, cousin, but I am hoping to spend my time reading the Bible and praying to the Lord.

Well, you may do as you please, as long as you can regain your normal self!

For the next sixty-two days, Wang focused on reading through the Bible, not once but six times over.

Brother Wang, you are far from being mentally affected! In fact, you are fit to preach right here in Tsang-Hsien.

How sweet these words are to my ears! Many back home in Peking had thought that I was mentally unwell when I left my job in Baoding and returned home!

What a relief to hear otherwise!

Unexpectedly, on 28 May 1921, Wang Ming-Dao received a letter of invitation from Teacher Chun, an old friend from Tsang-Hsien City.

On 28 June, they met up, where Teacher Chun told Wang,

Wang felt as if a huge stone had rolled away from him. For the first time in Wang's preaching experience, he was given an opportunity to minister God's Word in a church building in Tsang-Hsien.

Close to two and a half months later, Wang was again invited to preach in the same church in Tsang-Hsien. Altogether, Wang had been in the Tsang-Hsien church for more than three months. This preaching engagement had strengthened Wang's conviction of God's call to the preaching ministry. He was led to say, "Now I am more assured than ever of my calling to be a preacher. Moreover, God has given me the necessary gifts and ability to fulfil it. I am now looking forward to more occasions to preach the Gospel!"

To be continued



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