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A Journey of Faith



Above all,
love each other deeply,
because love covers over
a multitude of sins.
1 Peter 4:8

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Editorial



Rev. Vijayesh Lal

Uplifting Motherhood in India and the Church

In India, the reality of motherhood stands in stark contrast to the societal ideals placed upon it. While there's societal pressure for mothers to appear joyful, the harsh social and material conditions many endure often make genuine happiness elusive. Studies show that 59% of urban women in Delhi awaiting childbirth suffered from antepartum depression, and 41% experienced postpartum depression after delivery. Mental health challenges like anxiety and depression afflict mothers at alarming rates, impacting their emotional wellbeing and ability to nurture their children.

From the staggering 11.8 million pregnancies among adolescents under 18 between 2000-2013, to the 4.5 million girls aged 15-16 who were already mothers in 2015-16, Indian women confront a litany of stressors detrimental to maternal and child wellbeing. The preference for sons puts women at risk of having multiple pregnancies until a male child is born. Access to quality healthcare, nutrition, and reproductive services remains inequitable, with marginalized groups like tribal communities faring worse - a cross-sectional study in Jharkhand and Odisha linked maternal

psychological distress to increased risks of infant deaths and pregnancy complications.

Even in India's capital, the gaps between the rich and poor in maternal care are unreasonably wide. Only 19% of pregnant women in Delhi's slums likely receive skilled birth attendance, compared to 99% among the urban rich. Just 56% of children in slums get measles vaccinations, while 27% of pregnant women miss crucial prenatal visits.

Amidst these sobering realities, the Indian Church has a profound calling to uplift mothers and honour the sacred vocation of motherhood. Scripture reveals that from the very beginning, motherhood reflects God's glory – women's unique ability to nurture new life mirrors the generative love of our Creator (Genesis 1:28).

Throughout the biblical narrative, mothers play pivotal roles in furthering God's

purposes. From Eve, the "mother of all living," to Jochebed protecting infant Moses, to Hannah's fervent prayers birthing the prophet Samuel – mothers' courage, faith, and selflessness shape the divine story of redemption. Pre-eminently, God chose a humble young woman, Mary of Nazareth, to bear the Christ child – her body becoming the vessel for the Incarnate Word who would redeem humanity (Luke 1:38).

Motherhood is not peripheral, but the very means by which God brought redemption to the world. By celebrating motherhood, the Church honours its indispensable role in God's story of redemption. As the Scriptures testify, mothers manifest the Lord's ongoing work of making all things new through their selfless, often unseen sacrifices of body, soul, and spirit (Colossians 1:20).

The Church is called to celebrate, empower, and advocate for mothers in their

high and demanding calling – recognizing that in doing so, it participates in the ongoing work of Christ. Creating support networks, ensuring affordable maternal care, confronting unjust societal pressures, and empowering informed choices should be priorities aligning with Jesus' heart for the marginalized and vulnerable.

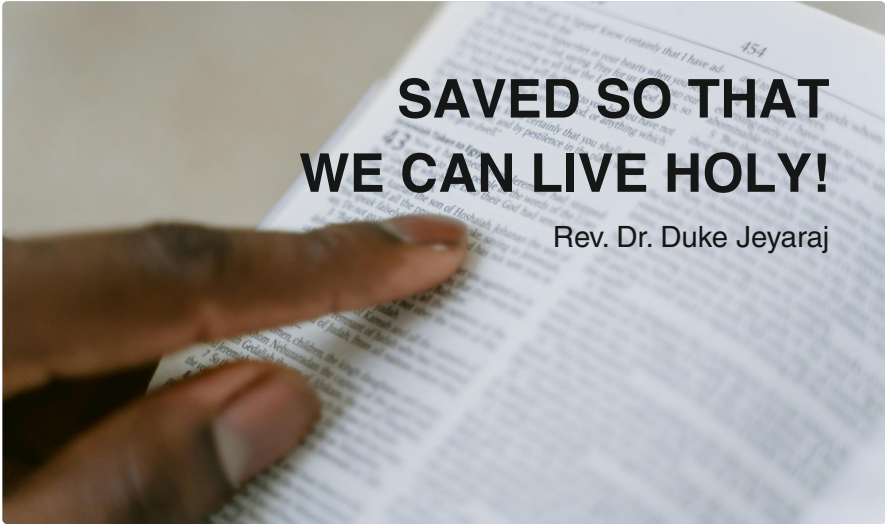
The Church can reshape cultural narratives, combating unrealistic expectations and providing safe spaces for mothers to share authentic joys and struggles without judgment – reflecting the radically inclusive community exemplified by the early church (Acts 2:44-47). In

communities where mothers face intersecting injustices, the Church's prophetic witness echoes Christ's mission to uplift the downtrodden and oppressed.

Ultimately, the Church honours mothers by embodying the heart of God – the embodiment of redemptive, life-giving love. As Indian mothers embrace this high calling with resilience, may the Church in India uplift them, celebrating their strength and empowering them to nurture abundant life for their children and families – bearing witness to the Kingdom that has come and is yet to come in full.

Rev. Vijayesh Lal

**“I have no greater joy than this:
to hear that my children are
living according to truth.”
3 John 1:4**



We had an unforgettable family holiday in October 2014. We went to Goa, the famous beachside city on India's West Coast. We were playing in a swimming pool in our hotel. Evan, my wife, my kids, Dale, 11 years, Datasha, 7 years, were with me inside the pool. This swimming pool was shallow at one end (as low as two feet). It got progressively deeper, and the other side was as deep as eight feet. None of us in our family knew to swim, including yours truly. We were floating around in an air-filled swimming tube. It was fun. After staying in the side of the pool that was shallow for long, I eventually got bored. I wanted some excitement. I decided to catch the sides of the rectangular

shaped pool with my body in-between the tube and go all around it, jumping up and down. It was exhilarating to feel my feet floating in water, with my waist inside the circular tube and my hands on the side walls during some sections of my daring journey that brought jitters to my dear wife who was also in the pool. Pretty soon, I got bored of doing this as well. I told my son, "Dale, let's go towards the other side of the pool by using the tube, right through the middle of the pool." Despite protests from my wife, I started off with Dale. Both of us held onto to the tube – with the tube around Dale's waist. Pretty soon, we were in a spot of the pool, where the height was

over 7 feet. I suddenly realized that we were both sinking (I am 5 feet, 8 inches tall). It dawned on me that the tube could not hold both of our weights – my 80 kg frame and my son's 25 kg frame. It was then I made a snap decision. I let my son, hold on to the tube exclusively and pushed him vociferously towards the shallow side of the pool and released myself completely from the tube. In an instant, I was sinking into the waters. It was one of the most frightening few seconds of my entire life. My wife and daughter gasped.

There weren't any others by the pool side to help me at that point. As my wife cried out for help, a man inside one of the first-floor hotel rooms adjacent to the pool was willing to help me. But alas, his door was locked from the outside. He was getting ready to jump to the pool-side from his room's balcony! Under the waters, meanwhile, I lunged towards one side of the pool in desperation. I wanted to somehow get to the side-wall. I felt a supernatural power upon me as I realized that I had touched the side wall in a few seconds. I reached for the side-

wall's top enabled by this supernatural power. It was as if someone under the waters had pushed me toward the sides! I pushed myself out of the water gripping the side-wall's top. I was saved! It was the Lord's supernatural and gracious help! I believe he sent angels in the pool to rescue me that day, mercifully!

IN THE POOL AGAIN, BUT THIS TIME....

Fast forward to December 2017. My wife's (from-her-hostel-days) friend and her husband, drove us to a posh beachside resort in a coastal city. There was a swimming pool there. On one side the depth of the pool was 4 feet. And on the other side, it was 9 feet! It was a repeat of the Goa swimming pool scenario. I jumped into the pool with my family. I cradled the son of my wife's friend in the part of the pool that was 4 feet deep. But did I venture into the 9 feet side of the pool? No. Why? Having been miraculously saved by God in a similar swimming pool following a fool- hardy choice I made, I wanted to be a responsible “water-wader” (Note: I can't be called a “swimmer” yet as I pen these words!). Having been

saved from sinking, out of gratitude I wanted to avoid the “sin” of venturing into the deeper parts of the pool!

That is the kind of response God expects from us. We are saved by grace. And grace should breed ever-growing gratitude in us. And that gratitude moves us to turn away from sin. This truth I have understood from the Bible time and again.

The Bible book of **Leviticus** presents this clearly. In Leviticus 11:45 we read, “For I am the Lord who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy” (NKJV). What was God's message to people of Israel? This message: “I graciously saved you from the Egyptian bondage, therefore, be holy!” Holiness in daily life is the result of an earnest overflow of gratitude to the Lord who graciously released us from our respective Egyptian bondages. Yes, we are graciously saved from bondage to the Devil, so that we will live holy on a daily basis! That's one key message of **LEVITICUS**.

The message of the book of

Hosea is also the same: you are saved so that you will live holy. You know the main story of Hosea if you have read the first chapter of this book. Prophet Hosea had to pay, “fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and half of barley” to release her from a brothel she had voluntarily gone into for the love of wanting to have sex with different men all day and night (Hosea 3:2 NASB). Prophet Hosea paid for the release of his wife from a brothel with both “cash” (fifteen shekels) and “kind” (homer and half of barley) – with bucks and barley! **J. Andrew Dearman**, a Bible Scholar who specialised in the study of the book of Hosea wrote, “A homer is a substantial measure of grain. It is ten times larger than an ephah or a bath – read Ezekiel 45:11-15. Since at one point in Israel's history, a male or female slave was worth 30 shekels of silver (see Exodus 21:32), it is possible that a homer and half of barley combined was worth 15 shekels of silver” [*The Book of Hosea*, page 135]. So, I would like to think that Hosea paid for his wife's brothel rescue using 50% cash and 50% kind. I have a theory here. I guess he was short of cash and since he loved his wife and

wanted her back, he used all the cash he had and used the agricultural products in his possession like barley to cover for the money he did not have! This wow gesture of love by Prophet Hosea towards his wayward wife is symbolic of what Jesus did for us on the Cross. He paid for our salvation with his precious, sinless blood, giving up all that he had. He 'emptied himself' as Paul wrote (Phil. 2:7). What did he tell his now "rescued" and "saved" wife? Check out the very next verse of Hosea 3 (the greatest love chapter of the Bible according to me). It reads this way: "You shall not play the harlot..." (Hosea 3:3). What's the message here for Gomer (that was the name of Hosea's wife) here? This: "You were bought from the brothel you ran voluntarily into by your loving husband despite the hefty price the brothel owner demanded for your release. But having now been so rescued, do not get back to the brothel again! Live a pure life, egged on by a feeling of gratitude for your husband who loved you, even when you loved adultery!" The message of Hosea for the New Testament believer is straight-forward: "Jesus, saved

you from the "brothel" of pornography, sex-outside-of-marriage through the precious blood he shed for you on the Cross. Now, live a life of holiness, including a life of holiness when it comes to your sexuality!" That is the message of **HOSEA**.

Next, let us move to the book of **ZECHARIAH**. We read about Joshua, the high priest there. This was not the Joshua, the youth deputy for Moses. This Joshua mentioned in Zechariah, was involved in giving leadership to the people of God who returned to the land of Israel after their stay of captivity in Babylon for seventy long years. There we read that God cleansed Joshua (he perhaps was in serious sin and was unworthy to serve as a high priest!) and called him for a holy walk. Eugene Peterson translates Zechariah 3:3-7 in trendy English this way: "Joshua, standing before the angel, was dressed in dirty clothes. The angel spoke to his attendants, 'Get him out of those filthy clothes,' and then said to Joshua, 'Look, I've stripped you of your sin and dressed you up in clean clothes.' I spoke up and said, "How about a clean new turban for his head also?" And

they did it – put a clean new turban on his head. Then they finished dressing him, with God's Angel looking on. God's Angel then charged Joshua, “Orders from God-of-the-Angel-Armies: If you live the way I tell you and remain obedient in my service, then you'll make the decisions around here and oversee my affairs. And all my attendants standing here will be at your service” (*The Message*). This is the main message of this passage from the book of Zechariah: we are freely clothed with clean garments by God so that we will live up to our responsibility of having to live with freedom from sin, that is, to live holy lives. In other words, this passage teaches us this: having been freely given the holy dress to wear, thanks to the grace of God, we must daily refuse to “caress” sin, because we are simply duty-bound to do that, if at all we have any sense of gratitude for the grace, God generously showered upon us.

Let us switch over to the New Testament now. What do we see there? The same truth repeated time and again.

Apostle Paul wrote the following words to his young ministry ward: “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age” (Titus 2:11-12 NASB). What is he saying here? You were saved by grace! Therefore, turn away from ungodliness, in response, out of gratitude! Here is another statement Apostle Paul made in the same correspondence he had with young Titus: “But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds” (Titus 3:4-8 NASB). To understand “the

good deeds” that Paul is talking about in Titus 3:8, we must read verse 3 of the same chapter which goes this way: “For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another”(NASB). This was how the believers of Crete, the congregation that Titus gave leadership to, were before they were saved. “But” having been saved they will now do “good works” (See Titus 3:4,8 for the phrases “but” and “good works”). What “good works”? Avoiding the “disobedience, deception, enslavement to lust and pleasures, etc” (See Titus 3:3). What is Paul saying in Titus? Since we got saved by grace, we should do good deeds, moved to gratitude by the same grace – that is Paul's point, here! We are saved to live holy, says the book of **TITUS!**

To another young team member of his ministry, Paul wrote, “For God saved us and called us to live a holy life” (2 Tim. 1:9, NLT). Sanctification (a life of turning away from sin as God has set us for holiness) follows salvation –

that is Paul's point. We are saved to live holy, says the book of **2 TIMOTHY!**

Paul was the pastor of the church at Ephesus for the longest time (when this his stint at Ephesus is compared to his other pastoral stints in other locations). Here is his strong pastoral admonition to this church: “For it's by God's grace that you have been saved. You receive it through faith. It was not our plan or our effort. It is God's gift, pure and simple. You didn't earn it, not one of us did, so don't go around bragging that you must have done something amazing. For we are the product of His hand, heaven's poetry etched on lives, created in the Anointed, Jesus, to accomplish the good works God arranged long ago”(Eph. 2:8-10, *The Voice*). Apostle Paul, what are you saying here? This could be Paul's reply: “God saved us by His Grace so that we accomplish good works.” We are saved to live holy, says the book of **EPHESIANS**. We can make this teaching from Ephesians even more memorable. Ephesians 4:1 says God chose us to be holy and blameless before the foundation of the world. That's our calling. In

other words, God chose us to be saved before the world's foundation. That's indeed a privilege. But that privilege comes with a responsibility which is explained in Ephesians 4:1. That verse tells us we must live a life worthy of our calling/salvation we have freely received. When seen together – Ephesians 1:4 and 4:1 – we learn this: we are saved to live a holy life!

Three different New Testament books. And in them we have found this clarion call: you are saved to live holy! That's not all.

Check out yet another book of Apostle Paul. Check out the book of Romans. This is what Apostle Paul wrote there: “Therefore, we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4 NASB). In the first part of the verse, Paul refers to water baptism. Water baptism is symbolic of who saved us and with what he saved us. Indeed, Jesus saved us by cleansing us with His Blood! So, having been saved what should we do? Check

out the later portion of this verse. It says, we must walk in “newness of life”. That means our life should change following our salvation. The sinful things we used to do before Jesus graciously saved us, we will not do them anymore! Why? We are ever grateful for grace. That is the message of this portion of **ROMANS** – another New Testament book that teaches us that we are graciously saved so that we live holy!

Let us move to yet another New Testament book – the book of **FIRST THESSALONIANS**. Here Apostle Paul talks about the salvation of the believers this book is addressed to. He does so in I Thessalonians 2:13: “For this reason, we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.” After they became believers, what was God's expectation of them? We read about this expectation in the same book. “For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know

how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God” (1 Thess. 4: 3-5, NASB). God's expectation from believers is that they live a holy life – especially in the area of sex. That is Apostle Paul's challenge to the Thessalonians here. That would be his challenge to the Google generation too! If our lives do not change following our salvation, and we are stubbornly in sexual sin, we, in-effect, “do not know God” (1 Thess. 4:5) according to Apostle Paul. But if we do know God, that is, if we are born again, if we are saved through the blood of Jesus, then we will definitely “abstain from sexual immorality” and not use our bodies “in lustful passion”(1 Thess. 4: 3, 4).

So, there you have it: **five New Testament books teach this very thing which is ultra-important: we are saved by grace of Jesus Christ so that we will live holy lives – including holy lives in the area of sex! The three Old Testament books we referred to at first – Leviticus, Hosea, Zechariah – also teach the very same thing, in shadow.** The list of Bible books which teach that we are saved to be sanctified I

have quoted from here is not exhaustive!



Rev. Dr. Duke Jeyaraj

is the founder of Grabbing the Google Generation from Gehenna Mission, the G4 Mission; He is an itinerant Bible Teacher/Evangelist who has ministered in 20 different Indian states and in 7 countries with the organisers sending him the tickets! He is the author of three books, including, Straight Talk, a book that brings frank Bible teaching wrapped around contemporary events on sex, love, marriage, porn, phone-addiction, etc. He is currently writing his fourth book, Hyper-Biblical, a treatise against three modern false teachings: Hyper-Grace ('Since God always sees Jesus who is perfect, sin in your personal life does not matter'), Hyper-Supernaturalism ('Healing always God's Will and must happen now; no death for believers') and Hyper-Love ('you stop existing once you land in hell; all will be saved eventually as God is a God of love'



A God who Sanctifies.

Mr. Chacko Thomas

“Chosen, not for good in me, Wakened up from wrath to flee; Hidden in the Saviour's side, By the Spirit sanctified – Teach me, Lord, on earth to show by my love how much I owe.” A Hymn of Murray McCheyne.

“For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one, for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brothers,” (Hebrews 2:11 WEB).

Sanctification is a unique Christian attribute:

“Sanctified daily is a unique Christian attribute,” wrote my brother-in-law, Baskaran Nair. “It is a steady and slow walk with the Saviour through confession and renewal as a sinner.” He

continues, “Danger ... Sanctimonious attitude, Self-sufficiency, not dependent on Saviour and Spirit but Self”.

Sanctification is God's will for me, a sinner. By Justification I stand perfect before God. I am a “saint” and all believers are saints. We have eternal life. We are fit for heaven. But as we walk this earth, live this life, our feet get dirty, and need daily washing and restoring. King David had experienced it, so that he could say: “He restores my soul”. Our hope is God who has made provision for our Sanctification. His blood cleanses us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:5-9). To confess is to agree with God that we have failed, we have sinned.

Thank God for honest Christian leaders like George Verwer who were secure enough to speak more often about his failures and short coming than his monumental ministry achievements. He did not want anyone to think that he is perfect or holy. He and his wife decided early in their marriage that they would remain an open book for all to see and read. One of his earlier books was *Hunger for Reality*, another was *Pseudo Discipleship*, still in print and available in India.

“The word 'Sanctification' describes the process that God wants every Christian to experience. God wants us to be sanctified, increasingly to become like Him in all that we think and do. Sanctification means to grow in Holiness.” (Taken from *The Essential Truths of Christianity* by Richard Bewes and Robert Hicks)

As a youngster, I was aware of too much human effort in all things Christian and too little of what God has accomplished or provided. I remember hearing about a group that would have a day of fasting and all-night prayer meetings to prepare themselves

to take part in their monthly Holy Communion as “worthy” people.

We used to hear about 'sinless perfection', 'entire sanctification' and of people who had achieved it. By my 'make-up', I could have been an easy prey and could have been one more 'full blown' hypocrite Christian. But God was gracious to bring me across George Verwer's teaching and it looked more Biblical to me.

It's Not a Matter of Emotion

Eric Fife in *PRAYER Common Sense and the Bible* tells a story about our self-efforts to be “worthy” before God. Here is how Fife introduces the story: “Much confusion is caused because many think that repentance is a matter of emotion. It is a matter of the will. God does not say if you feel sorry I will forgive you! He says, 'If we confess our sins, he ... will forgive our sins and cleanse us' (1 John 1:9).

“I once knew a man who had a remarkably close relationship with God, he would confess without fuss and go on his happy way. His wife was a more reserved person, and one day she remarked to her husband.

'Ed, you deal with your sin with so little fuss, it is hardly decent.' She had made the mistake of thinking that true repentance means being emotionally depressed by guilt. This morbid depression originates in man rather than God. We need to examine ourselves for sin for only as long as it takes to recognise it and confess it. Then, we may immediately enjoy forgiveness and fellowship with God."

Holiness and Sanctification:

A Children's Catechism produced by my church asks the question: "What is Sanctification?" The answer, "It is God's way of making sinners holy in heart and in conduct." I would have quoted the Shorter Catechism, had it not been so much longer.

"God wants His people to become like Christ, for Christlikeness is the will of God for the people of God." This is John Stott's answer to the question, "What is the chief end of man?", taken from Rev. John Stott's *The Radical Christian*. "Christ Likeness" is one of the nine chapter headings of his final "farewell" book to his readers.

Here is another exhortation from John Stott: "If we claim to be Christian, we must be like Christ".

J. I. Packer in his study of *18 WORDS*, treats Holiness and Sanctification under one chapter. He writes: "These two English nouns in our title represent one-word group in both in Hebrew and in Greek. ... It comes under four headings in the Bible: The Nature of God; The Duty of Man; The Work of Grace in and upon the Christian and the Church; and lastly, The State of Future Glory".

He warns us against trying to understand any one of them in isolation from the other three. "We need this warning particularly, perhaps, in connection with the third theme – holiness or sanctification as a work of grace. For here, we Evangelicals frequently go astray. ... Our special 'holiness movements' and 'holiness teaching' and 'holiness meetings' direct our attention to this one topic. ... Christian people seeking holiness have become self-centred, small-minded and conceited, thinking too much about themselves and too little about God."

The Bible says: “But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, “LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD.” (1 Corinthians 1:30-31) At least a dozen times the Bible God claims that “I am the Lord that sanctifies you”. (See Leviticus 20:18, 21:23; Ezekiel 20:12; Matthew 23:17; Hebrews 2:11) Holiness and Sanctification appear 1300 times in the Bible, most of them (1000 times) in the Old Testament, about 300 times in the New, obviously an important subject.

Three Views of Practical Sanctification: The book *Every Man A Bible Student* by J. E. Church has the following note in his chapter on Sanctification: “Note: There are three main views as regards the way in which God has enabled us to deal with sin and experience Practical Sanctification:

1)Eradication, i.e. that the evil principle of sin may be rooted out. This is contrary to the Scripture.

2) Suppression: i.e. that we are all the while suppressing a

struggling enemy. This view means perpetual internal struggle.

3) Counteraction: i.e. that the evil nature has been rendered helpless (Greek *katargeo*—“make of no effect” Romans 6:6) and remains so as long as the condition of the Victorious Life are observed, but can resume its activity if they are broken.

“As the Temple was cleansed by Christ, so must our hearts continually be cleansed by Him, if sin comes in nothing that defiles must remain therein.”

John Wesley on "Why Should Believers Repent"

“In what sense are we to repent and believe after we are justified? Repentance frequently means an inward change, a change of mind from sin to holiness. But after we are justified, we speak of it in a quite different sense, as a kind of self-knowledge – knowing ourselves to be sinners before God, indeed, guilty, hopeless sinners, even though we know that we are children of God.

“When we are born again, and the love of God is poured out into

our hearts, it is natural to suppose that we are no longer sinners – that all our sins are not only covered but destroyed. We feel no evil in our hearts, so we readily imagine none is there. Though we readily acknowledge that he who is born of God, and 'he that is born of God does not commit sin', yet we cannot allow that he does not feel it within. Sin does not *reign* but it does *remain* and a conviction of the sin which remains in the heart of the believers is one great branch of the repentance we are now speaking of.

“For it is seldom long before one who imagined all sin was gone feels there is still pride in his heart. And yet he knows he is in the favour of God. He cannot, and ought not to, cast away his confidence, for the Spirit still witnesses with his spirit that he is a child of God.”

I must bring this article to a close. Sanctification is a unique characteristic of Christian faith. It is free. Let us appropriate it by faith in confession and prayer. Our God is a God who sanctifies. He wants us to be holy like He is. As Christians we are to be like Christ in this world.



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"No doubt about it: children are a gift from the Lord; the fruit of the womb is a divine reward."

Psalm 127:3

A photograph of a woman in profile, seen from behind, holding a baby wrapped in a blanket. They are standing on a beach looking out at the ocean under a warm, orange sunset sky. The sun is a bright circle on the horizon.

Mothers With Sincere Faith

Rev. Dr. David Mende

Introduction

A mother's job is tough. Pastor Brian Bill says, "By the time a child reaches 18, a mother has had to handle some extra 18,000 hours of child-generated work. In fact, women who never have children enjoy the equivalent of an extra three months a year in leisure time!"

For some, Mother's Day may not be a joyous occasion. For instance, some women are unable to conceive and become mothers. A few of you probably had a mother who didn't care for you. Probably your mother is no more. Some women lose their children at an early age. Some mothers may be anguished about their prodigal son or daughter.

And some single mothers struggle to raise their children.

Today, some mothers focus more on their careers rather than investing their time in their children's lives. Of course, in some families, some mothers may have to work to meet their basic financial needs. But, mothers, may I remind you that your work is one of the greatest ministries on this planet. You can impact your children spiritually like no one else. As Abraham Lincoln said, "No man is poor who has had a godly mother!" In 2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14-15, we read that a man of God was greatly influenced by his mother and grandmother. Based on this text, I've entitled this article "**Mothers**

With Sincere Faith.”In this passage, Apostle Paul exhorts Timothy to continue in what he has learned from his mother and grandmother. We can learn two *lessons* from this passage.

1. Mothers Must Possess Sincere Faith (2 Tim. 1:5).

Paul visited Lystra on his first missionary journey (Acts 14:16-20). During his second missionary journey, Paul went to Lystra again, and there he met a young man named Timothy. Timothy had a good reputation among believers. So, Paul took Timothy along with him on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:1-3). Timothy is referred to as Paul's “beloved and faithful child” in 1 Corinthians 4:17. Also, he refers to Timothy as a “true child in the faith” in 1 Timothy 1:2. Paul had a high view of Timothy. He tells the Philippians, “For I have no one like him [Timothy], who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare” (Phil. 2:20). That's a great testimony!

After the Lord Jesus, Apostle Paul is considered to be the greatest Apostle who impacted the world for God's glory. Timothy

had the great privilege of being one of the main associates of Apostle Paul. But how did Timothy develop such faith? In 2 Timothy 1:5, Paul writes, “I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.” The Greek word translated as “sincere” is *anypokritos*, which literally means without play-acting or show or hypocrisy. Timothy's grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice had sincere faith, which they passed on to Timothy.

Once a man bought his wife a beautiful diamond ring for Christmas. A friend of his said, “I thought she wanted one of those pretty 4-Wheel drive vehicles.” “She did,” he replied, “But where in the world was I going to find a fake jeep!” There is “sincere” faith, and there is “fake” faith. Which kind of faith do you possess? The word *anypokritos* is used in five other verses.

Sincere faith doesn't imply perfection, but a constant pursuit of godliness. Paul says that this sincere faith “dwells” in

Timothy. The same Greek word is used to mention the indwelling of the Spirit (2 Tim. 1:4). This shows the depth of Timothy's faith. This faith first dwelt in Lois and Eunice. These women had consistent faith. They didn't demonstrate this faith once in a while, but this faith *dwelt* in them.

The faith of Lois and Eunice is commendable because, in the Roman world, fathers generally exercised absolute authority over their families. Timothy's father was a Greek (Acts 16:1) and was probably unsaved. Despite this, his mother brought him up in sincere faith. Generally, it's the father's responsibility to lead his family in spiritual matters. But if the father is unsaved or lukewarm, mothers must take up this job. Parents can and must raise children in godly ways even if the environment at home is not ideal. Our children cannot inherit our salvation, but our upbringing definitely makes an impact on them.

"I am sure" (2 Tim. 1:5) is in the perfect tense which suggests that at some point in time, Paul was persuaded that Timothy had

sincere faith and he remains persuaded about it. It's a great blessing to have godly parents. God blesses the children of those who fear him: "Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations" (Deut. 7:9).

Let me give you a couple of Jewish proverbs that talk about the importance of mothers:

(1) One mother achieves more than a hundred teachers.

(2) Honor your father and mother, even as you honor God, for all three were partners in your creation.

Mothers must possess sincere faith.

2. Mothers Must Teach God's Word to Their Children (2 Tim. 3:14-15).

In contrast to "evil people and impostors [who] will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived" (v. 13), Apostle Paul asks Timothy to continue in what he has learned and firmly believed. Here, "continue" is a present imperative in Greek. Paul

is calling Timothy to a lifestyle that is dedicated to orthodoxy and orthopraxy. “Learned” and “firmly believed” are in the aorist tense in Greek. The aorist tense speaks of a historical fact or a completed event.

While “learned” talks about the content of Timothy’s faith, “firmly believed” talks about the conviction of his faith. In verse 14, “whom” is plural. It probably refers to Paul and even his mother and grandmother who are mentioned in 1:5. Parents, apart from you, God can use godly pastors, mentors, Sunday school teachers, youth leaders, and others to teach and positively influence your children. Timothy didn’t just learn from the teachings of Lois and Eunice, but from their life as well.

“Do as I say” will not work with children. What impacts them is “Do as I do.” What are you passing on to your children? Godly parenting is the greatest gift you can give to your children.

“Childhood” in verse 15 literally means infancy. I remember my wife, Susan, reading God’s Word

to our daughter, Karis, every day even while Karis was in her womb. The Jews taught God’s Word to their children at an early age. In Deuteronomy 6:4-7, the Bible says, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.”

In Proverbs 22:6, the Bible says, “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.” This verse was truly fulfilled in Timothy’s life. “Acquainted” (v. 15) is in the perfect tense, which reveals that Timothy was acquainted with God’s Word from his infancy and it continued in the present time. Parents must mold their children early in their lives.

Four scholars were arguing over Bible translations. One said he preferred the King James Version

because of its beauty and eloquent old English. Another said he liked the New American Standard Version for its literalism and how it moves the reader from passage to passage with confident feelings of accuracy from the original text. The third scholar was sold on the New Living Translation for its use of contemporary phrases and idioms that capture the meaning of difficult ideas.

After being quiet for a moment, the fourth scholar admitted: "I have personally preferred my mother's translation." When the other scholars started laughing, he said, "Yes, she translated the Scriptures. My mom translated each page of the Bible into life. It is the most convincing translation I have ever read."

This world desperately needs mothers who live out the Bible. Paul goes on to say that these sacred writings are able to make us wise for salvation. The Bible shows us the way of salvation and the way to grow in it. That's why mothers and fathers must teach God's Word to their children. The Bible must be the

spiritual foundation for you and your children.

Conclusion

The main message of this article is: **Mothers must possess sincere faith and teach God's Word to their children.**

Many students of church history are familiar with the story of Susanna Wesley, who counted John and Charles among her nineteen children, only nine of whom lived to adulthood. Susanna was said to have prayed for her children two hours a day, along with teaching them their basic school subjects. She was well-prepared to care for and lead her large family. She was the daughter of a well-known minister, the youngest of his twenty-five children. Susanna benefited from a godly home and passed the heritage onto her children. Although his Christian heritage probably did not span as many years as that of the Wesleys, Timothy also benefited from a godly home. His mother and grandmother, Eunice and Lois, are two largely unsung heroines of the Bible.

I'm glad that we can still learn from these unsung heroines. Mothers, develop a sincere faith, and teach God's Word to your children. Your investment in your children can impact this world for God's glory.



P.S. This article is adapted from Dr. David Mende's book, *Powerful Sermons for Special Occasions*. You may contact him for copies of this book.

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Original Goodness: Not Original Sin

Rev. Dr. Naveen Rao

“And God saw everything that God had made, and behold, it was very good.” - Genesis 1:31a.

For a long time, theological articulations, Bible study groups, and revival preaching have heavily emphasized the concept of Original Sin. This concept suggests that all are born sinners because of Eve and Adam's sin, referred to as The Fall (Genesis 3). This thought is supported by a few biblical references, such as Psalm 51:5 "I was brought forth in sin..." and Romans 5:12-21 "As the first Adam brought sin..." One of the early Church Fathers, Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE), was also a proponent of the theology of Original Sin.

Several preachers have made

the concept of Original Sin the starting point of the Christian faith and practice. Such sermons tend to put congregations in an emotional, psychological, or spiritual condition of self-inflicting remorse, guilt, fear, anxiety, and helplessness. Sunday after Sunday, the pounding of this thought of Original Sin has worked towards leading people into repentance, humble surrender, and a penitent mood, making them vulnerable to submission.

However, let us review this thought of Original Sin and evaluate its foundation in the biblical text and Church traditions.

The theory of Original Sin is

based on Adam and Eve's disobedience in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3). But how can we take the act of disobedience of two human beings to be so detrimental to God's entire plan that it overshadows, cancels out, and neglects all that God has spoken in Genesis chapters 1 and 2?

The concept of Original Sin imposes predestination, where the fate of human beings is already fixed. It upholds and promotes a kind of caste system that assigns the birth of some people as being from the lower or lowest caste, thereby remaining untouchable and outcaste all their lives since birth. If we preach on the Original Sin acquired by all humans at birth, it becomes the same as a caste system.

Furthermore, while the idea of Original Sin claims that every human is born a sinner, it simultaneously justifies sinful acts as a given. It takes away human responsibility for having freedom to make right decisions, choices for their lives, and bear the consequences. Original Sin renders human beings helpless before its overarching, all-encompassing, inherent, implied,

and dominant claim of a sinful nature. It denies human freedom to choose otherwise, as if humans cannot make any decisions other than sinful ones.

Absence of Original Sin in Crucial Biblical Texts:

Apart from the references interpreted to mean Original Sin in Genesis 3, Psalm 51:5, and Romans 5:12-21, there are several crucial biblical texts where the thought and word of Original Sin are absent.

- There is not a single reference to Original Sin in the Ten Commandments, neither in Exodus 20 nor in Deuteronomy 5.

- There is no mention of Original Sin in the Sermon on the Mount by Jesus in Matthew chapters 5 to 7, nor in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12).

- There is no reference to Original Sin in the Lord's Prayer that Jesus Christ taught his disciples in Matthew 6:9-13.

- In the celebration of the Last Supper in the Upper Room by Jesus with his disciples, Jesus did not mention or seek

repentance from Original Sin before joining in the fellowship of the breaking of the Bread and shedding of the wine, which we know as the Eucharist or Holy Communion. Although in most ecclesial rituals of Holy Communion, there is a section of 'Prayer for the Humble Access,' it does not mention Original Sin.

- In the early Church's formulation of various Creeds, such as the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed, there is no word, clause, or implied reference to Original Sin.

On the contrary, there are several biblical passages that deal with the idea of Original Goodness as opposed to the idea of Original Sin. Let us go through those texts:

Firstly, in the narratives of Creation in Genesis 1-2, God created everything 'Good,' and at the conclusion, God exclaimed everything as 'Very Good.' God made the world, including human beings, "Good." God created human beings in the image and likeness of God. So, if we are to ask 'how good' human beings are, the answer would be 'as good as the Image & likeness of God.' As good as good can be.

Secondly, God not only created everything good but also created the whole creation with the inbuilt power to yield its own fruits in its own season. Each one is given the inherent blessing of having seeds of its own kind. With this inbuilt capacity to be creative and to procreate and reproduce, God activated this inbuilt feature with the words of blessings - "Be fruitful, multiply & fill the earth." Particularly to human beings, God gave a special blessing of being created in the 'Image and Likeness' of God. One interpretation of 'being created in the image and likeness of God' deals with the attributes of wisdom, power of discretion, and freedom of choice. In a way, God gave Freedom to be fruitful, freedom to multiply, and freedom to fill the earth. The freedom of choice is inherent in the manner in which God completed the work of Creation. God has made creation into a self-sustaining, self-propagating, and self-reviving existence. Then, on the Seventh day, God withdrew from Creation to take Rest - Sabbath. In a way, God took rest from running our lives and Creation with the confidence and trust that God's work in creation was inherently equipped to be Good

and very Good. The basic nature of Creation is good because a good God has created a good creation for goodness.

Thirdly, the freedom of choice comes along with God's goodness in creation, with the image and likeness of God in human beings, and with the blessings of being fruitful, multiplying, and filling the creation. In our terminology, it is called free will. God has given free will to choose. The power of discretion, freedom to make choices, and free will operate in a scenario where there are at least two options to choose from. And that is why there were two forbidden trees in the Garden of Eden, calling humans to exercise their God-given freedom to choose not to eat from their fruits. If there are no options and human life is helplessly bound by Original Sin, then the gift of God in the form of the blessing of freedom of choice and free will has no meaning. Original Sin demands that humans be puppets capable of doing only evil under the power of Original Sin. Always, there is a choice to choose from, a responsibility, and consequences for them alone, as individuals and families, but

never for all of humanity for all time, until eternity.

By adhering to and submitting to the idea of Original Sin in our faith system, we are ignoring the God of unconditional grace and love who has created human beings in God's own image and likeness with the power of discretion, decision-making, and choices with their consequences.

There are several textual references to freedom of choice and that humans are not predestined to do evil due to Original Sin.

Psalm 1 talks about the choice between two Ways: on the one hand, there is freedom to be Good, or freedom to be wicked. Human beings, by free will, are capable of walking on the path of each. The Psalmist wonderfully concludes on the consequences of each, the end of each path where it would lead. God knows the future of both, where each choice is going to lead people. There is no fixed decision for humans from God to choose the evil path first.

Our second text, Luke 6:46-49, deals with the two choices of

making a home on two foundations. It is human freedom to choose that leads to a firm home or the destruction of the home. There is no fixation on how to make a house because of Original Sin. There is no fixed pattern of choices for humans, like evil work first and then good after salvation.

Thirdly, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, after seeing the wounded person on the road, two pious persons decided to turn away and go, but one person chose to help by his free will.

Our good God has provided us with the blessing of freedom for human choices, and each choice leads to a particular end with its own cost and consequences.

In both texts, there is an expression of human choices, their consequences, and then after that, if there is a need, God's plan of restoration and grace comes into play.

Alternate Choices for Sin, Evil, and Wickedness:

It is often preached what goodness, its nature, its way, and its end are. But it is seldom that

preachers take up the themes of evil, wickedness, and sin - their nature, process, and end results.

To illustrate, a computer has two basic parts: hardware and software. Among the software, there are viruses - programs that work towards destroying other good software, functioning against the operating system itself. Similarly, cancer refers to cells or groups of cells that destroy and kill other good cells. In fact, cancerous cells are parasitic, feeding on good cells to grow rather than sustaining themselves. Sin, wickedness, and evil work against the "Goodness of God" and the goodness of Creation as created by God. They are intentional acts against normal humanity.

What we learn about sin, evil, and wickedness is that their very nature is self-destructive. Even when no one is opposing, judging, or condemning them, sin destroys itself. Sin operates against the normal, 'the good' created by God. For goodness is the normal way to live, but for evil, one needs to plot, plan, and find crooked ways to achieve its goal.

Inhaling fresh air is normal and

good, as created by God; inhaling smoke is crooked and unhealthy. Loving is the normal good way to fall in love and marry; but to flirt, commit adultery, or keep multiple partners is crooked. Obedience is normal; disobedience requires lame excuses, crookedness, and craftiness. To see someone in need and go out to help is a normal instinct; to see someone in need and avoid, ignore, and go away is crooked.

Ultimately, it is goodness that holds the world together. All evil has to have goodness surrounding it to float. The world operates on the principle of goodness. Honesty is what holds society together; even for a dishonest person to practice dishonesty, there is a need for an honest society. Evil is exceptional and rare, whereas goodness is normal and spontaneous. Wicked deeds require a lot of plotting and

planning, but good deeds are easy and free-flowing.

A good God has created a good world for goodness to live among good people - Goodness is Normal. You and I are called the "Salt of the Earth" and the "Light of the World" to spread goodness in the world because you are good.

(The article is based on a sermon delivered by Rev. Dr. Naveen Rao)



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"Now faith, hope, and love remain –
these three things – and the
greatest of these is love."
1 Corinthians 13:13



PRAYING MOTHER

Rev. Kuruvilla Chandy

After father's death, mother was the one who raised my siblings and me. She had been educated only up to pre-university level. Straight out of Kerala, her marriage exposed her to sophisticated and classy folks in Bangalore. She was a learner and learnt well – learning to converse and correspond in English. While father was alive, she never worked outside the home. She confined herself to managing the home.

I remember that she used to have a devotional book entitled *Jesus Loved Martha*, that she used to read. In those years I never saw my mother at prayer. Until she had sent father and us children off to work and school, respectively, she couldn't spend time in prayer.

She had to wait until she was free from her labours of love. The fact that she had the book *Jesus Loved Martha*, and it was well used, proved to me that she did have her own prayer life.

After father died, when she was heading the home, I witnessed her coming out of her closet. She would rise up early and sometimes, when I happened to get up early, I saw her on her knees. Sometimes, I could hear her undertones pleading for me and my siblings.

Mothers pray for their children more than the children pray for themselves. Mother prayed for us. All of us knew that whatever happened we could count on Mother praying for us—for our

home and work, for our children—for their growth and happiness.

When my mother was dying, the last thing she did was to pray for my sister, her family, my brother, and for me and my family. Afterwards, she slipped into unconsciousness and went to her Lord. We miss her prayers for us.

Godly Mothers of the Bible

Praying mothers are legendary. While the Bible doesn't say that Jochebed prayed for Moses before launching him in a basket on the Nile, I cannot imagine that this courageous mother who defied the Pharaoh's diktat about killing baby boys, would have sent her baby boy out without a prayer. She did what she did because she believed in the providence of God. She expected her baby to live. Her faith was rewarded.

Hannah was a praying mother before she became a mother. When she was taunted for being childless, she turned to God. Her husband could not give her the son she wanted, nay, needed. Through prayer she went beyond her husband to get a son (1

Sam.1:1-15). She made a promise to God. People who make promises claim the future and shape it when they keep their promises. Hannah kept her promise to God and gave her son to God. Clearly, she raised Samuel with dedication and imparted that devotion to her son. Samuel learnt to be committed to God from his mother. Hannah's song (2:1-10) was a precursor to Mary's song (Lk.1:46-55) – maybe even the source of inspiration for Mary's song. Hannah showed her trust in God and declared His power to uplift those in trouble.

That Mary, the mother of Jesus, prayed for Jesus is undeniable. She is described in the Bible as a mother who "pondered" things concerning her baby (Lk. 2:19, KJV). She reflected on those matters. Reflection is an act of careful consideration – or shall we say prayerful consideration? That she was a woman of prayer is seen in the Magnificat, her song of jubilation when she learnt that she was to be the mother of the Son of the Most High (1:46-55).

Paul made mention of Timothy's grandmother and mother,

implying that Timothy was in the faith primarily because of their input by example and instruction (2Tim. 1:5).

The history of the Church has story after story of godly mothers famed for praying faithfully for decades for the salvation of their sons and daughters who in later life became famous for their evangelistic activities.

Saintly Monica

Both Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, and his mother Monica, were both canonised by the Roman Catholic Church. He was a philosopher and theologian who was influential in the development of Christian theology and is regarded as a "Doctor of the Church". Augustine was born in present-day Algeria. Monica was a Christian. She pleaded that he would become a follower of Christ Jesus, but resisting his mother's pleas from the time he was 16, Augustine led an immoral life. He had a child out of wedlock, embraced heretical teachings, and was even a thief. Augustine infamously prayed, "Grant me chastity and continence, but not yet."

For decades, Monica kept on praying for her delinquent son, following him wherever he went. She kept pestering Bishop Ambrose to talk to her son, and he finally said, "Go in peace. It cannot be that the son of these tears should be lost."

Augustine was converted in Milan in AD 386, when, hearing a child's chant, "Pick up and read, pick up and read," he opened Paul's letter to the Romans and by God's grace read, "Let us behave honourably as in the day: not in orgies and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. Rather, put on the Lord Jesus Christ and allow no opportunity for the flesh to gratify its sinful desires" (13:13-14). Augustine said, "I read no further, for I did not need to. Instantly, the sentence ended, there was infused into my heart something like the light of full certainty, and all the globe of doubt vanished away." When he told his mother what had happened, Augustine wrote that "she leaped for joy triumphant, and she blessed God who is able to do exceeding abundant above all that we ask or think."

Soon after her son's conversion, Monica died. On her deathbed, she said that her life's work was over, but her son's work was only beginning. Augustine went on to shape all subsequent Christian history, writing more than 1000 works, including 242 books. All because the prodigal had a praying mother.

Grace Imparted

John Newton, famous for the hymn "Amazing Grace", had a caring mother who didn't live very long. Elizabeth suffered from tuberculosis and suffered from chronic fatigue.

Elizabeth's faith was genuine, but her husband was just formal in religious observance.

John Newton Sr. was a sea captain who was away from home for long periods. Elizabeth was John Newton's teacher spending hours each day at the task. He later wrote, "As I was her only child, she made it the chief business and pleasure of her life to instruct me, and bring me up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

Seeing that he grasped theology

quite easily, Elizabeth prayed and hoped God would call him to ministry. "My mother observed my early progress with peculiar pleasure, and intended from the first to bring me up with a view to the ministry, if the Lord should so incline my heart."

Meanwhile, the TB had advanced aggressively, and she died at the age of 27. John was barely seven at the time.

On returning from the sea, his father married right away. At first, his stepmother was attentive, but when she had children of her own, she not only neglected him but kept him out of family life. He became distant and rebellious.

When he was just 11, his father decided it was high time for the young lad to accompany him on his voyages. When his father retired from seafaring, he worked for a trading company and wanted his son to go to Jamaica as a slave plantation overseer. However, falling in love with a girl in Kent, Newton lingered so long he missed his ship to Jamaica, and thwarted his father's plans. As punishment, his father sent him to sea as a common sailor in the British Royal Navy. Rebellious

against the severe discipline of the navy, he deserted, but was captured and flogged before being discharged from service.

Newton ended up working for a slave trader, on an island off the western coast of Africa. He was illtreated brutally. He was in rags and had to beg for food. After more than a year of living in such abusive conditions, in 1747 Newton managed to escape the island. He took work aboard a ship that docked in Liverpool. Newton had, by this time returned to reading the Bible again, as well as Thomas a Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ*.

The following year, as the slave trading ship was bound for home, it ran into a violent storm, on March 21, 1748. Newton woke up to find the ship in desperate straits. He became convinced that he would soon meet his Creator. Recalling Scripture verses about God's marvellous grace towards sinners that his mother had taught him, Newton prayed for the first time in years. For the rest of his life, he would remember the day as the anniversary of his conversion.

Looking back on his life, John

Newton always gave credit to his mother for preparing him for salvation. He acknowledged the early training he had received from her and her many prayers on his behalf: "Though in process of time I sinned away all the advantages of these early impressions, yet they were for a great while a restraint upon me; they returned again and again, and it was very long before I could wholly shake them off; and when the Lord at length opened my eyes, I found a great benefit from the recollection of them."

Though Elizabeth was gravely ill for most of her son's early life, she did not allow ill health to prevent her from fulfilling her God-given duty of being a mother. Instead, her sickness made her toil urgently in instructing her son in the knowledge of Scripture, Christian doctrine and inculcating spiritual habits. She taught him songs that would remain in his mind and heart until his dying day. She taught him to honour the Bible and to turn to it for spiritual knowledge and strength. She shared the good news of the gospel, that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ Jesus. In her view, imparting spiritual values was the best thing she

could do for her son. Newton cannot be understood without taking note of his godly mother's influence.

Finding Quietness

Susanna was the last of twenty-five children. She herself had nineteen children, but nine died in infancy. Her husband was a clergyman.

She had the huge task of homeschooling all the children of varying ages and aptitudes. Girls were not taught "feminine skills". Susanna believed differentiating between sons and daughters was completely wrong. And so, Susanna taught her sons and daughters the same things, something not done at that time.

Knowing from experience that getting quality one-on-one time with a parent in a large family was hard, she had a schedule for each of her children to spend an hour with her alone before bedtime on one particular night each week.

Even though she was extremely busy with running her home and mothering her children, she still set apart two hours every day for reading God's Word and praying.

To find her secret place for prayer in the midst of the hustle and bustle of her home filled with so many children, she would sit in her chair and throw her apron up over her head. Everyone in the household knew that when Susanna was under the apron, she was with God and was not to be disturbed except in an absolute emergency. In the privacy of her tabernacle, she prayed for her husband and children.

Her husband Samuel was away often. Finding the substitute minister's messages uninspiring and lacking in depth, Susanna began teaching the Bible to her brood in her kitchen on Sunday afternoons. Soon neighbours asked to join. As word got around more people joined up until she had about two hundred people attending. Her reason for holding house meetings were to care for her children's spiritual development, the salvation of neighbours, and a desire to keep the Lord's Day holy. Later John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, wrote that his mother "had been in her measure and degree a preacher of righteousness." (Another son was Charles, the hymn writer,

whose hymns are still sung in churches around the world).

Influencing Through Prayer

Charles Spurgeon, who was known as the "prince of preachers", came into the ministry largely because of his mother's influence. His father was a busy preacher caring for his congregation.

His father wrote of the time he came home early from his work and witnessing his wife's routine: "I opened the door and was surprised to find none of the children about the hall. Going quietly upstairs, I heard my wife's voice. She was engaged in prayer with the children; I heard her pray for them one by one by name. She came to Charles, and specially prayed for him, for he was of high spirit and daring temper. I listened till she had ended her prayer, and I felt and said, 'Lord, I will go on with Thy work. The children will be cared for.'"

Some of Spurgeon's earliest memories are of his mother gathering the children to read the Bible to them and to plead with them to turn to Christ. To her children she was not only a teacher, but an evangelist.

Her intercessions made a deep impression on young Spurgeon that many years later he wrote, "How can I ever forget her tearful eye when she warned me to escape from the wrath to come?" Another time, she wrapped her arms around his neck and simply cried to God, "Oh, that my son might live before Thee!" The deepest desire of her heart was to see her children embrace her Saviour.

After he came to Christ, Spurgeon wrote to his mother paying tribute for being his foremost teacher and the one who had begged God for his salvation: "You, my Mother, have been the great means in God's hand of rendering me what I hope I am...You, by God's blessing, prepared the way for the preached Word...I love you as the preacher to my heart of such courage, as my praying, watching Mother."

And later on, he said, "There was a boy once—a very sinful child—who hearkened not to the counsel of his parents. But his mother prayed for him, and now he stands to preach to this congregation every Sabbath. And when his mother thinks of her

firstborn preaching the Gospel, she reaps a glorious harvest that makes her a glad woman."

Spurgeon's mother reaped the reward because she had been faithful. She had taught her children God's Word, she had prayed for their souls, and she had pleaded with them to turn to Christ. She had earned her son's praise: "Never could it be possible for any man to estimate what he owes to a godly mother."

Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission, was another who acknowledged his mother's prayers for him. Taylor is regarded as the Father of Faith Missions for advocating, "Moving men, by God, through prayer alone" and not soliciting funds at all. He wrote about leaving his mother to go to China: "My beloved, now sainted mother, had come over to Liverpool to see me off. Never shall I forget that day, nor how she went with me into the cabin that was to be my home for nearly six long months. With a mother's loving hand she smoothed the little bed. She sat by my side and joined in the last hymn we should sing together before parting. We knelt down and she prayed—the last mother's prayer I was to hear

before leaving for China. Then notice was given that we must separate, and we had to say good-bye, never expecting to meet on earth again.

"For my sake she restrained her feelings as much as possible. We parted, and she went ashore giving me her blessing. I stood alone on deck, and she followed the ship as we moved toward the dock gates. As we passed through the gates and the separation really commenced, never shall I forget the cry of anguish wrung from that mother's heart. It went through me like a knife. I never knew so fully, until then, what "God so loved the world" meant. And I am quite sure my precious mother learned more of the love of God for the perishing in that one hour than in all her life before."

Pray!

In her devotional *Out of the Spin Cycle: Devotions to Lighten Your Mother Load*, Jen Hatmaker wrote, "Perhaps no service rendered to our children is more important than our intercession. A mother's job is to pray for her children while they don't have the words, understanding, or insight to pray for themselves. We stand

in the gap, praying for their salvation, gifts, and lives, much like the Spirit prays for us" (p. 25). There's a lot that mothers do to serve their children, but let it be emphasised that the greatest thing they do is praying for them. Their prayers have a far reach into the future of their children.



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If my mother didn't pray for me, where would I be? Probably lost. If you fail to surround your children with prayer, where would they be in the end?

“If you come across a bird’s nest along your way, whether in a tree or on the ground, with baby birds or eggs, and the mother is sitting on the baby birds or eggs, do not remove the mother from her young.

You must let the mother go, though you may take the young for yourself so that things go well for you and so you can prolong your life.”

Deuteronomy 22:6-7



The Flaming Fire of God

Rev. Dr. Samuel Richmond

Power of Fire

Imagine a world without iphones, airplanes, computers, ipads, tandoori chicken, metal tools, cars, medicine, electric lights. Think of a life without fire. God has given capacity to humans to harness fire. Fire recycles nutrients, produces plants, and shapes environments. It also helps in cooking, glassmaking, metallurgy and producing various items that support human survival. The San people of the Kalahari Desert an ancient race who lived in South Africa for thousands of years, had made extensive use of fire, making the one of the oldest peoples on the earth. Their mastery of fire predates recorded history and played a fundamental role in shaping human culture and civilization.

Fire in the scripture symbolizes the presence of God and the Word of God, which is active and influential in refining our spiritual lives. Interestingly, water baptism and the baptism by fire, complement each other. Water baptism symbolizes purification, repentance, our identity with Christ and our initiation into the Christian Faith. The baptism by fire symbolizes the Holy Spirit enabling, purifying, and transforming believers for spiritual growth and service. In Luke 3:16, *John answered them, "I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. Baptism by fire is a lifelong process of spiritual regeneration and empowerment.*

Let us study the relevance of God's fire in the Bible.

God's Presence

The presence of God in the Bible is often associated with fire. According to Deuteronomy 4:24 and Hebrew 12:29, the Word of God says, *"For the LORD your God is a consuming fire..."* The burning bush Moses encountered on Mount Sinai, and the pillar of fire that guided the Israelites through the wilderness are excellent examples of God revealing Himself through fire in the Old Testament.

In Exodus 3: 1-5, when Moses was caring for his father-in-law Jethro's sheep, he saw something unique at Horeb, the mountain of God. There, the Lord's angel showed up to him in the form of flames from within a bush. The fire did not destroy the bush, though. Moses went up to see what was going on. When the Lord saw Moses' curiosity, He called out from within the bush and told him to take off his sandals. It was the first time in the history of humankind that God revealed Himself in the form of fire.

In Exodus 13:21,22, God guided the children of Israel with a pillar

of fire by night. After the Israelites were freed from slavery in Egypt, God led them through the wilderness toward the Promised Land. During their journey, God manifested His presence as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. This pillar of fire provided light and guidance for the Israelites in the darkness of the desert. It served as a tangible reminder of God's constant presence and guidance, ensuring that the Israelites remained on the right path and were protected throughout their journey.

Further in the Bible, before the Jerusalem wall was broken, God said to His people in Zechariah 2:5, 'For I will be a wall of fire around her, and I will be the glory in her midst.' This refers that when God said He would be like a wall of fire around Jerusalem, He used a picture to show how He would keep them safe and close to Him. The idea of a wall of fire shows that God's protection is strong, and nothing can get pass through it. It shows that God cares for His people and His presence guards us from harm.

In the book of Revelation, John sees Jesus' vision. In Chapters 1 & 2, he describes the beauty of

Jesus. In Revelation 1:14, he writes, "The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire..." In Revelation 2:18, John mentions, "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: 'The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze.'" In this context, Jesus' fiery eyes represent his ability to see into the hearts of individuals and discern their thoughts, actions, and intentions. This imagery suggests that Jesus, as the righteous judge, possesses perfect knowledge and discernment. His fiery gaze symbolizes his role in judging the deeds of humanity with absolute justice and righteousness. Nothing can escape his scrutiny or evade his judgment.

Holiness and Purity

God's divine presence, which is in the form of fire, is so powerful that no impurities may stand before Him. In Exodus 3, God asked Moses to remove his sandals because the ground where he was standing was holy. God's fire has the power to remove all our impurities that try to bring hindrance between us and Him. As it is written, for our God is a consuming fire. The fiery presence of God reviles human

embarrassment. In Genesis 3:8, when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden by eating the fruit, God came to visit them, but "they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden" because they were naked. His presence exposed their nakedness.

In the book of Isaiah chapter 6, when King Uzziah died, Isaiah saw the vision of heaven. He sees that God is seated on the throne. The Seraphim were calling to one another in Vs. 3:

*"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord
Almighty;
the whole earth is full of his
glory."*

Isaiah cried out to the Lord and said in Vs. 5, "For I am a man of unclean lips." The Bible says in 6: 6-7, then one of the seraphim flew to him with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar and with it he touched his mouth and said, vs 7 "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." While seeing the vision, Isaiah realized he was a sinner and needed cleansing. The fire of God purifies us from sins and their guilts.

In Ezekiel 1:26, 27, God used a

vision of fire to warn Ezekiel of His coming judgment. The Vision of fire serves as a powerful symbol of God's presence, holiness, and impending judgment. Ezekiel describes seeing a figure resembling a man, radiating with intense brightness like glowing metal and fire, seated on a throne. Ezekiel describes in vs. 27, "he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him." This vision **underscores** God's overwhelming majesty and purity, conveying His holiness and power. The fiery imagery serves as a warning of divine judgment upon the rebellious people of Israel for their sins and idolatry, urging them to repent and turn back to God. It also symbolizes God's refining work, purifying His people and calling them to live in obedience and reverence before Him.

After Jesus' resurrection, He revealed Himself to His disciples by the Sea of Galilee in John 21 while they were fishing. When Simon Peter recognized Jesus' voice, he hastily wrapped his outer garment around himself, as he had taken it off earlier (for he was naked), and eagerly plunged into the water. Simon Peter was embraced by Jesus' presence.

He tried to cover his nakedness by jumping into the water. Knowing that every sin is exposed before God's presence is important.

When a person is diagnosed with cancer, he has to undergo chemotherapy. Chemotherapy is a drug that burns the cancer cell. Another latest technology is microwave ablation, which helps in treating certain types of tumours. It involves the use of microwave energy to generate heat and destroy cancerous cells. Similarly, when people go through spiritual cancer, it is only through the fire of God that all their impurities are destroyed.

During my time ministering at the Yesh Darbar in Allahabad, a woman who was possessed by a demon once approached for prayer. As soon as I applied the anointing oil on her forehead and placed a few drops on her palm, she began to yell "Fire! Fire! Fire!" She continued, "The fire is consuming me." "I shall depart from her." The demon immediately departed, and she was delivered from all demon possession.

God's Word as Fire

In Jeremiah 5:14, the Word of the

Lord came to Jeremiah and said *"I am making my Words in your mouth a fire and I am making these people wood so they will be burned up."* God's Word is like a fire which consume the people like wood. In Jeremiah 23:29, God says, "Does not my word burn like fire?" The fire of the Word of God is active, energetic and powerful. If we have the fire of the Word of God, our hearts will burn to live a holy and pure life. Psalmist says in Psalm. 119:9-11 *"How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. 10 With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! 11 I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you."* This fire of God's Word which ignites us will also ignite the souls of those searching for the living God.

In Mark chapter 5:1-20, when Jesus and his disciples came to the region of the Gerasene, He came across a man with an impure spirit who came out from the tombs to meet Him. He had often been chained and cut himself with stones. When He saw Jesus, he shouted vs.7 *"What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High*

God? In God's name, don't torture me!" In Matthew 8:29, the demons said, "What do you want with us, Son of God?" they shouted. In Mark 5: 8 demons said *"Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?"* Then Jesus had said to him, *"Come out of this man, you impure spirit!"* Later in vs. 15, he became perfectly alright. The fiery presence of Jesus and the fiery words can burn and destroy the demonic power. In Luke 12:49, Jesus said, "I have come to bring fire on earth..." By this fire, He destroys the principalities of darkness.

Remember, God's Word in our mouth is like a fire. In Luke 24:13-35, two people were going to a village called Emmaus and, on their way, met Jesus. They couldn't recognize him, but when He broke the bread, their eyes were open immediately. After that, He disappeared before their eyes, in vs. 32. They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" When we speak God's Word, people's hearts will start burning, demonic spirits will flee, and the anointing of God will flow from our lives and will impact others.

Fire of Anointing

One day, John Wesley was asked — "What is your secret? Why do so many people come to hear you preach?" Wesley answered — "I get alone with God in prayer. He sets me on fire. The people come out to watch me burn." In Luke 3:16, John the Baptist answered them all, *"I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."* The baptism by fire is very crucial for every believer. If we don't have that experience then we won't be able to win any spiritual battle. There is an ongoing Spiritual Warfare, and if God's presence, God's holiness, and God's Word do not richly dwell in us, then satanic powers will start dominating. The experience of the Day of Pentecost by Jesus' disciples in Acts 2:3-4 describes, *"there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit,"* reminding us of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

In Revelation chapter 3, Jesus said to Laocedia Church in vs. 16 *"So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor*

cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth." We have to make a choice that either we may grow cold or hot. Deepak used to attend church regularly but stopped when he found the sermons repetitive. Deepak couldn't admit the real reason for his absence when the priest visited him. While they sat in silence by the fire, the priest used a piece of coal to illustrate his point: *"just as a coal loses its heat when removed from the fire, so too does a person lose their warmth when they distance themselves from others."* Inspired by the metaphor, Deepak agreed to return to church next Sunday.

When we are in God's presence, the fire of God is manifested through our lives. Paul instructs young Timothy *"For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands (2 Timothy 1:6)."* Baptism by fire is a continuous process, where the refinery work continues until His glory and light are reflected through our lives.

Malachi 3: 2-3 *"For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. 3 He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the*

Levites and refine them like gold and silver." Converting ore into metal involves several steps, typically mining, crushing, concentrating, smelting, and refining. One day, a young man interviewed the silversmith on "Refining Silver and Gold by a fire." The first question he asked was, "Why do you heat the metal?" he asked? The Refiner answered, "To make precious silver, I have to remove all the impurities that make it worth less than it really is." "Why do you sit while you work?" inquired the visitor. The Refiner replied, "I must closely monitor the fire. Insufficient heat won't eliminate impurities, while excessive heat will ruin the precious metal, rendering it worthless." Then the young man asked The Refiner, "How can you tell when the silver has reached the correct temperature?" The Refiner smiled and answered, "I know the purifying is complete when I can see my reflection in the silver." The young man marvelled at the answer thinking, "That is true in my life. My own fiery trials were only complete when My Refiner's image could be seen in me."

Warren Wiersbe describes the process of divine testing by

writing, "When God puts His people into the furnace, He keeps His eye on the clock and His hand on the thermostat. He knows how long and how much. (If we rebel, He may have to reset the clock; but if we submit, He will not permit us to suffer one minute too long. The important thing is that we learn the lesson He wants to teach us and that we bring glory to Him alone.)"



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The Crucified Life

[Part II]
Crucified Flesh

Rev. Kuruvilla Chandy

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a theologian who lived during the time of Hitler. He was active in the resistance movement and was so committed to the overthrow of Hitler, that he was executed for his role in the conspiracy to assassinate Hitler. This man who laid his life on the line for what he believed, wrote, "The cross is laid on every Christian. The first Christ-suffering which every man must experience is the call to abandon the attachments of this world. It is that dying of the old man which is the result of his encounter with Christ. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death—we give over our lives to death. Thus it begins; the cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god-

fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die...death in Jesus Christ, the death of the old man at his call. (*The Cost of Discipleship*, 99).

Paul wrote in Galatians that the self (I/ego), the flesh and the world should end up on the cross, when we become followers of Jesus. As we saw earlier, the ego is crucified with Christ so that the Risen Christ can live in us (Gal. 2:20). The ego's life in the flesh and connections to the world also need to end on the cross.

The term "flesh," in this context may sometimes be misunderstood. There is the

hostility between Spirit and flesh (Rom. 8:5-8; Gal. 5:16-17). The term 'flesh' is associated with carnality and lusts (Rom. 13:14; 1 Pet. 2:11). The carnality of the flesh is obviously contrary to the Spirit. It is not as easily seen that, when the flesh works at being spiritual, it is still working against the Spirit. The good deeds of the flesh are still the deeds of the flesh (Jn. 6:6).

We are saved by grace through faith. Salvation is not the product of our own efforts, but God's gift. If we feel satisfied with our human efforts, we would be proud (Eph. 2:8-9). Paul's list of the deeds of the flesh includes not only what human society categorises as gross sins, but also those that are regarded as mild. While he makes no distinctions at all and he mixes them all up, he lists the full range of sins from the ones that society condemns to the ones that are excused and yet leaves the list open-ended so that all the efforts of the flesh may be included.

In Galatia, the problem was not one of utter lawlessness. They were decent people trying to live good Christian lives by doing the works of the Law (3:3). Paul wrote then that the works of the Law

were nothing more than the works of the flesh. The works of the Law are contrary to grace (3:2-3; 5:4; Eph. 2:8,9). It is the pride of the flesh that is at the root of the works of the Law (Phil. 3:3-6). The Spirit is not only opposed to the flesh (Eph. 5:16-17), but is opposed to keeping people under Law (Gal. 5:18). Paul argued against both the good works of the flesh (the observance of the Law) and the bad works (Gal. 3:10-11; Rom. 3:20).

From the context, the flesh that needs crucifixion is identified by extreme egotism that destroys others to feed itself (Gal. 5:15-16, 25-28). Our "in the flesh" condition is what puts us in touch with others in the flesh. But when flesh meets flesh in a dog-eat-dog-world, the natural tendency is to protect oneself and outmanoeuvre others in every encounter. The new liberty in Christ was not to be viewed as a throwing off all restraints and an opportunity for indulging the flesh in its natural egotistic tendencies. Rather, since love is the redemptive feature of those who have given up slavishness to the Law for the heart of a child of God (4:6, 7), that love should express itself in service (5:6, 13). Paul

talks of not allowing the flesh to indulge in egotism by "walking in the Spirit" (5:13-16). When we live by the Spirit, we will not allow the flesh its egotisms. Thus, Paul is describing walking in the Spirit in terms of loving people, especially the brethren of the household of faith (5:26; 6:10). In a similar way, John described walking in the light as just walking in love (1 John 1:5; 2:11).

Fruit of the Spirit

It is no wonder then that the "fruit of the Spirit is love..." (5:22). As many preachers note, there are not many fruits. There is just one fruit consisting of the ingredients of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control and the like. A careful look at the other ingredients would show them indeed to be no more than aspects of love. It is all about a basic attitude or spirit that we manifest in relationships.

While love of all we meet is envisaged in the commandment to love neighbours, we must note that we do have a special relationship with those of the household of faith (6:10).

This is a matter of facing up to reality. We are mere humans, and we only have human capacities. We are incapable of loving the world. Only God can do that. Too often this is the failure of those who set out with world concerns for world poverty, world hunger and the like. The problems are so large that it defeats human ability and, so often, world concern simply becomes jargon and slogans that create offices of privilege for those engaged in meeting the needs of masses of people. The commandment itself indicates our inability to love faceless masses. We are called only to love neighbours who have faces. They are identifiable. We live in touch with them. Their needs touch us. Since this is our human condition and we can benefit only as many as our resources permit, a special love of the brethren is but logical. But such caring love will transform entire societies as was discovered in the Early Church for their one winsome characteristic that their world took note of was expressed in these words, "See how they love one another," and here and there many rushed to enter the caring society of the people called Christians.

The World Crucified

The final aspect of the crucified life is that of the world being regarded as crucified as far as the Christian is concerned (6:14).

The word "world" is used in three different ways in the Bible. There is the physical world of continents and islands, mountains and valleys, seas, lakes, and rivers. The word "world" can also refer to the population of the earth as when the Bible says, "God so loved the world" (Jn. 3:16). But the Bible also refers to the world as a diabolic system organised against God's reign. The concept of "worldliness" is derived from this understanding of the hidden world of dark and evil spiritual forces.

It is against this world that apostles warn Christians. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life is not from the Father, but from the world" (1 Jn. 2:15,16). James puts it more starkly and describes worldliness as nothing less than spiritual adultery (Jas. 4:4).

Worldliness is taboo in the world

of believers. But, because it is an abstract concept, there is a lot of confusion about what it involves and permits the prevalence of judgmental attitudes among Christians.

Worldliness is primarily not a matter of taboos (or customs). Lists of "do"s and "don't"s, as noted earlier, are quite arbitrary. What one group considers acceptable behaviour may in the view of another be worldly. For instance, most Christians would be considered worldly by the Old Order Amish in America, whose homes are not electrified and who will not own motorised transportation because, in their opinion, such things are worldly. Such lists of worldliness are made up of non-essentials, things that are not integral to Christian faith.

Worldliness is the spirit of conformity that makes people captive to a system that is opposed to God's rule. The slogan of worldliness is "everybody does it." It is more a mental attitude than customs and taboos. For instance, the acquisitiveness and materialism characteristic of those in the

world, are more signs of worldliness than smoking or seeing movies.

Viewed thus, worldliness can also exist when we are slaves to religious habits, customs, and taboos for the sake of being socially acceptable in our world of Christians. The Judaisers must have viewed Gentile Christians as worldly because of their failure to conform to Jewish practices. They even had a list of "do"s and "don't"s that attempted to turn the Christian faith into an ascetic one (Col. 2:21). Paul warned the Colossian church against having a piety that was regulated by humans (2:8, 16-18, 20-23). J.B. Phillips captured the essence of what Paul wrote when he translated Romans 12:2 thus: "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its mould." Paul discovered that the world can sometimes be apparently Christian, and when we conform to it, we have lost connection with the Head (Col.2:19).

The only way to deal with the world is to crucify it and be crucified to it. Crucifixion involves death. The Christian is to die to

the world and the world to him. The stimulants of the world do not move him to conformity, nor is the world stimulated by the Christian. When Paul considered all the badges of importance of his day and society, when one has to choose between Christ and the honours of human society, he crudely described them as comparable to shit (Phil. 3:8, KJV: 'dung').

Conformity for the sake of acceptance or esteem, valuing status and its symbols are the basic ingredients of worldliness. Pride is so very much a part of worldliness. John wrote of the "pride of life" (1 Jn. 2:16, KJV). C.H. Dodd describes this as the tendency to be captivated by the outward show of things without really enquiring into their real value. Our lives are filled with status symbols. We spend our lives trying to keep up with the Joneses, that mythical family that exists in the imagination of people whose lives are spent in acquiring status symbols.

However, possessions are not the only badges of pride. Even religiosity or piety can be sported

for the sake of human esteem (Matt. 6:1-18). Judaistic practices that prevailed in the Early Church were such a symbol of piety. Pride of life is what the Pharisees had. But Jesus tore away their sophisticated veneer when He declared, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts for what is highly esteemed among men is abomination in God's sight" (Luke 16:14, 15). The word "abomination" has connection with idolatry and that is what human pride is: an affront to God on the part of Man who ever wants to be like gods (Gen. 3:5,6).

Crucifixion is the only remedy for status symbols, badges of spirituality and whatever else that provides an occasion for human pride. For in crucifixion, we devalue them. Our identification with the crucified Saviour points to what we believe to be worth dying for. The glory of the cross surpasses all the glories of the world. It is the Lamb who was slain who is worthy to receive power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honour, glory, and praise (Rev. 5:12). It does not make sense

according to the world's calculations, but there it is. There is glory in the Cross.

The Galatian letter is very clear that there are not many gospels, but only one. The one true Gospel does not say, "Jesus+." The Gospel is about Jesus crucified and risen and when that Gospel touches our lives, as Christ is formed in our lives (4:19), we bear the marks of Jesus (6:17) for we have been crucified with Christ (2:20) and have crucified the flesh with its attempts to add to grace (5:24) and the world with its tendency to compromise about the status of the pluses that humans work to add to the Gospel (6:14), for the glory is all in the Cross.



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Character of Christians

Ps. Grish Lal Tamta

Introduction

There is a saying that if money is lost nothing is lost and if health is lost something is lost and if the character is lost everything is lost. It is so important that the entire life is built upon it. In other words, the character is a sum of choices we make to act, then it becomes habit, then habit becomes character and then the character makes the destiny. Most of the people give importance to power, position, and gift but not character. Therefore, the character and attitude of a Christian worker to God and people matters the most in ministry to serve God. A person is not worth to serve God without the characters like Jesus Christ. Such characters can be built by

surrendering to God, prayer, practice, study the scripture and the help of the holy spirit.

What is the meaning of character- The meaning of the word “character” is derived from the Greek word *χάρις* (charis) which means an indentation and later in English it was taken as “character” as a distinct mark in Individual. Jesus Christ who is the exact essence of God who sustained all things by the power of his word (Heb 1:3) is the character of God. This means if we have the characters of Jesus, we are like him and have life, and power of God who lives within us. The development of such character is possible only when we conform to the likeness of

Jesus Christ by practicing to develop with the help of the holy spirit (2 Cori 3:18). In other words, it is like inner life of a man, a moral being, reflect the divine nature, exemplified by values, thoughts, motivation, attitudes, action, and feelings.

Need for Christian character- scripture says in the last days wickedness will grow more and more, perversion like homosexuality, lesbians, same sex marriage, live in relationship, corruption and violence in the society and the world. These things will demand the Christian workers to increase godly character and become strong to maintain values and norms of the scripture and stand firm against the attacks of the enemies. However, scripture says, God will raise up righteous army of lord Jesus Christ to overcome them with the help of the holy spirit. The Christian character is the need of the hour to stand firm to overcome in such a time as this.

Character is formed during sanctification process- The sanctification is to stay away from evil which is an on-going process

in which the holy spirit helps deeply and constantly to convict, convince, and convert the worker. This results in genuine introspection, realisation, and repentance. This makes us a new brand in Christ (2 Cori 5:17). During this process, we must intentionally involve our will, mind, emotion, conscience, and behaviour to become like Christ. The divine power and human responsibility help to live righteously which Christ imputed into us.

In order to be Christlike, we have to develop more hunger for his word, spirit, presence and righteousness and live pure and holy life. We need to depend upon God to develop Christ like characters during sanctification (John 15:5-7). Bible says not only preachers, teachers, and evangelists but all believers need to develop as a self- disciplined teacher, courageous soldier, disciplined athlete, hardworking farmer, diligent workmen, sanctified vessel, gentle servant, faithful, law abiding, persistent and perseverant as the list goes on to serve the lord (2 Tim 2:1-26).

Six important characteristics of minister

There are six important characteristics of minister (HIS HAF).

- Integrity
- Accountability
- Honesty
- Self-discipline
- Humility
- Fruits of spirit.

Christian and secular leaders both realize today that the character is the most important traits of a human being to live a successful life. The consistency in behaviour and attitude of people under every circumstance is the need of the character. One can develop character by total surrendering to God and living a righteous life just and pure, holy like Christ. When we do so, the holy spirit convicts, convinces and converts us which results in genuine retrospection and repentance. We have to develop more hunger for his word and righteousness. We need to depend upon God to develop such characters like Integrity, Accountability, Honesty, Self-discipline, Humility, and fruits of the Holy Spirit.

Need for developing Christian character

Rick Warren says Christian character is the most important task on earth that will take us to eternity, and we will be rewarded by Jesus Christ based on the character we develop on earth. Paul says to Galatians to imbibe the fruits of the Holy spirit which is the perfect character of Christ. If we want to live Christ-like character, we need to have the fruits of Holy spirit (Gal 5:22-23) in our life on earth.

In the last days, wickedness will grow more, perversion like homosexuality, lesbians, same sex marriage, live in relationship, corruption, and violence in the world. These things will demand the Christians to increase godly character and become strong to maintain values and norms of the scripture and stand firm against the attacks of the enemies. However, scripture says that God will raise up righteous army of Lord Jesus Christ to overcome them with the help of the holy spirit. The Christian character is the need of the hour to stand firm to overcome.

Ways how Christian character is developed

The character is not developed by teaching and preaching in class room but it is built through the circumstances of life. When the circumstances like conflict, disappointment, difficulty, temptations, dryness, and delays are faced, we have a choice to respond. When we respond to them in godly way rather than in our natural inclination, we develop the character.

This development of character involves a choice which is not an overnight work but an ongoing process. The Lord has a purpose to develop character within us by allowing such kind of circumstances to build it. Bible says we suffer and persevere which develops character (Rom 5:3-4). By surrendering life to Christ and spending quiet time with him, praying, studying his word, and inviting Holy Spirit to work in our day-to-day life, will build the character. Apart from it, we can develop character by controlling our thoughts, practicing Christian virtues, guarding our heart, and keeping good company (1 Cori 15:33).

Our choices affect our Christian character-

Character is influenced and developed by our choices. Bible says Daniel chose not to eat the royal food to avoid defilement. This act became his habit and this habit became his character and finally destiny of becoming the 2nd most powerful person in the empire after king Nebuchadnezzar. His three friends decided not to bow to the idol, were put in fire but the creator God saved them, and they developed a character through these circumstances. In India, we come across incidents of *Prasad or sweet* given by non-believers to believers.

Paul makes it clear that one should not eat anything that is offered to idol because the same is blessed by idol. Eating of such food will be the evidence of participation in worshiping of

idol (1 Cori 10:21). Second issue is when anything is sold in the market, Paul says, we should eat and use it because the earth belongs to God as it is not offered to idol but dedicated (Ps

24:1). The third issue is when any

non-believer invites believer for a dinner at home and the believer comes to know that the food was offered to idol, he/she should not eat it and politely refuse it (1 Cori 10:30).

So, choice of company and friend also influence character of Christians. Bible says we should not walk with ungodly, sit with sinners, and stand with scornful people around us and make choice to follow Bible to build the character (Ps 1:1-6). We should not take them as enemy but pray for them (Rom 16:17). So, the choices help us to build character.

Conclusion

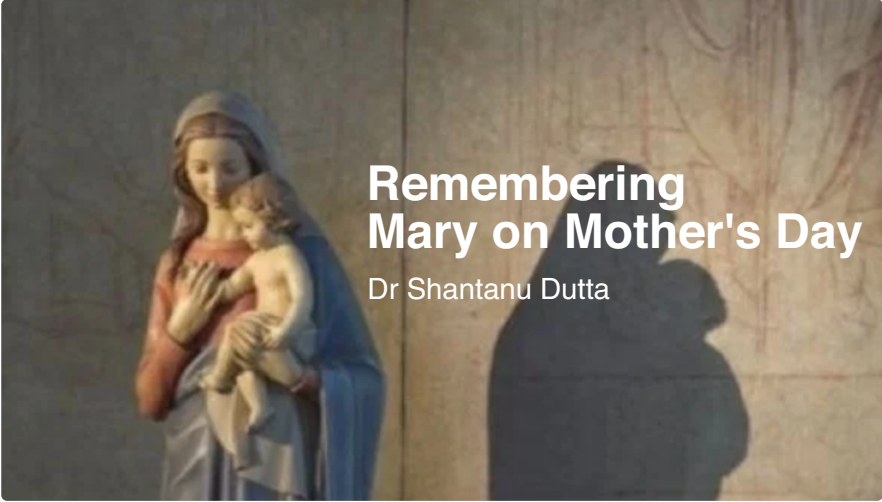
The Christ-like character is not only important in our ministry but also in our family and marketplace. Paul is writing to Galatians about Christ like characters and qualities to imbibe in every Christian (Gal 5:22-23). Developing the fruit of spirit is love, joy, peace, patient,

kindness, gentleness, goodness, self-control, and faith which is the perfect picture of Christ and live without law. He embodied all these characters and commanded us to follow in our life. Rick Warren says these Christ-like characters will take us to eternity and will help us take the reward from the Lord in the heaven based on the character we develop and demonstrate on the earth. He will reward those who have the characters like Jesus Christ and live in his likeness on the earth. Amen.



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“Let your father and mother be glad;
let her who bore you rejoice.”
– Proverbs 23:22-25



Remembering Mary on Mother's Day

Dr Shantanu Dutta

Mother's Day seems a good time to talk about the person many Christians revere as the Mother of God and honour her in various ways. However, to several Evangelical Christians, the topic would be disturbing if it were not for the character herself because Mary has been relegated to the shadows completely in the evangelical tradition, so much so that any mention of her outside of the Christmas season raises an eyebrow.

Discussions on Mary are nearly off-limits for Evangelicals. But while writing this article, I was interested to find out what the views of the early protestant reformers were on Mary and came up with quite a surprise. Here is a sampling :

Martin Luther, a prominent figure in the Protestant Reformation, held a nuanced view of Mary. He acknowledged her significance as the mother of God and believed that she deserved honour.

Even before Luther, John Wycliffe, a pre-Lutheran reformer, expressed deep reverence for Mary. He believed that seeking the help of the Holy Virgin was essential for obtaining heavenly rewards. Wycliffe's view reflected the prevailing Marian spirit of the later Middle Ages.

Zwingli, another Reformation leader, affirmed Mary's esteem. He stated, "I esteem immensely the Mother of God." Zwingli emphasised that as the honour and love for Christ increased, so

should the esteem and honour given to Mary. The debate among Protestant Reformers centred on the appropriate degree of honour for Mary rather than rejecting honour altogether.

The debate among the early reformers was a relatively healthy and helpful one. While early Protestant Reformers acknowledged Mary's role, they grappled with practical implications. How much honour should be accorded to Mary? Should she be venerated as in Roman Catholicism, or should her role be more subdued? These questions don't seem to remain a matter of ongoing debate within Protestant theology, with an informal consensus that any mention or reference to Mary as the Mother of God is just a short step away from veneration, adoration or worship.

The near-universal veneration of Mary became a casualty of the Reformation. As Protestant leaders rebelled against the sacramental and clerical system of the established Catholic church, Mary was almost written out of their version of Christianity, to be mentioned only at Christmas, if at all. In Protestant thought, Mary has been neglected, ignored, and

sometimes even disparaged, but given the biblical data about her, I think this is unfortunate.

So, in contemporary Evangelicalism, Mary is generally seen less intensely than in Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. Protestants focus primarily on worshipping God through Jesus Christ. Mary's role is acknowledged, but she does not hold any special place as she does in other Christian traditions. Evangelicals focus primarily on the biblical accounts of Mary. She is seen as a faithful woman who played a crucial role in the incarnation of Jesus. Key passages include the Annunciation (Luke 1:26-38), Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), and her presence at the cross during Jesus' crucifixion (John 19:25-27). Evangelicals do not attribute any special status to Mary beyond her role in the nativity story. They also reject the doctrines of Mary's assumption of heaven and her immaculate conception.

However, Mary has a central role in the Bible and should not be relegated to the Christmas pageant alone. In the New Testament, Mary is the mother of Jesus, the first to receive the gospel and proclaim it to others.

She is also called a "herald" of God's good news. However, some evangelical preachers have been hesitant to portray Mary as symbolic or exemplary because they might be seen as too sympathetic to Catholicism.

God made Adam and Eve his image bearers, those who were to represent his authority in his place by obeying his law, cultivating and keeping their land, and filling the earth with other image bearers through being fruitful and multiplying. But instead of obedience, Adam and Eve chose sin. Instead of ruling God's place, Adam and Eve chose to allow the Serpent into the Garden and listened to his word instead of God's Word. Because they failed to rule and obey, they received punishments from the LORD, affecting their ability to complete the other two tasks.

God says to Eve, "I will multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain, you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you" (Gen. 3:16). Being fruitful and multiplying is no longer a given. And neither is cultivating and keeping, since he says to Adam, "cursed is the ground because of you; in pain, you shall eat of it all the days of your life;

thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground . . ." (Gen. 3:17–19).

Ultimately, death enters the world, separating humans from their Creator. But there is also a promise amid so much cosmically significant pain – God will crush the head of the Serpent through the Seed of woman (Gen. 3:15), thus defeating the source of sin and reversing its effects. The rest of Genesis, and the rest of the entire Old Testament, is a search for this Seed, the one who will reverse the curse of Adam and restore what was lost in the Fall.

Mary has a pivotal and irreducible place in the Bible, and evangelicals must reclaim this aspect of biblical teaching if we are to be faithful to the whole counsel of God. When it comes to the gospel, Mary cannot be shunted aside or relegated to the affectionate obscurity of the annual Christmas pageant. In the New Testament, she is the mother of the redeemer and the first one to whom the gospel was proclaimed and, in turn, the first one to proclaim it to others. Mary is named a "herald" of God's good news. We cannot ignore the

messenger because her message is about the world's salvation.

Mary was subversive, and she was dangerous at first. She knew the identity of her son and, second, because she began to tell his story. Remember, Gabriel told Mary her son would be "Jesus" (Savior) and "Son of the Most High God" and that he would sit as a Davidic king on the eternal throne. God first tells her the true identity of Jesus. Thus, we first learn to see who Jesus was and is through her witness. Mary was the only person in the world who could have told the stories that now appear in our Gospels. She alone heard the potent words of Gabriel; she alone was with Elizabeth; perhaps she is the one who told Luke about Zechariah's song; only she and Joseph knew about the shepherds and the magi.

The Gospels come from many voices, and one of those was Mary's. Her voice tells us what God would do through her son to subvert the injustices of Herod and the pretentiousness of Augustus. Her voice tells us that somehow, some way, someday, God would establish a kingdom of peace for the whole world. In the story rarely told, Mary changed the world by surrendering to the

angel Gabriel with three words: "May it be." And God used her to set loose the power of God, the gospel of the kingdom. This is the real Mary; we must reclaim her voice as our own.

Evangelical retrieval of a proper biblical theology of Mary will give attention to five explicit aspects of her calling and ministry: Mary as the daughter of Israel, as the virgin mother of Jesus, as *Theotokos*, as the handmaiden of the Word, and as the mother of the Church. Can there be a proper place for Mary in evangelicals' prayer and devotional life? The early Protestant Reformers, as we have seen, all thought so. Evangelicals do not pray to Mary, but we can learn to pray like Mary and with Mary - all the saints.



Dr. Shantanu Dutta

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Intercessory
Prayer
Points



May 2024

1 WEDNESDAY Thank God for the new month with new opportunities to serve Him. Pray that you will faithfully and wholeheartedly serve Him.

2 THURSDAY Pray for Pongring Hope Foundation Centre, Manipur. Pray that the aim and objectives of this ministry will be fulfilled. Pray for God's enablement and empowerment.

3 FRIDAY Pray for Manipur that peace may be restored, and the work of God may continue. Pray that God would bring justice and healing to the suffering believers.

4 SATURDAY Pray for Sparsh Sewa Samiti, Uttar Pradesh. Pray for wisdom, encouragement, discernment to decide and the ability to do what needs to be done through their ministry. May God bless the ministry.

5 SUNDAY Pray for your church that you will be a blessing to many wandering souls. Pray that the Lord will bless your worship

service and that each one will be spiritually fed.

6 MONDAY Pray for Covenant Blessings Church in Maharashtra. Pray for many transformed lives in this Church as the word of God is taught, learned, and applied by individuals. Pray for the church's revival and growth.

7 TUESDAY Pray for D6 Asia Evangelical Alliance Family Conference to be held on May 17-18, 2024. Pray that many will sign up and participate.

8 WEDNESDAY Pray for Suman Bihar at Nawada, Bihar. Pray that the Lord would show His favour on this ministry and the people involved in it. Pray that many people would benefit from this ministry.

9 THURSDAY Pray for Sharing Love Mission at Tamil Nadu. Pray that as they share the Gospel to the Bhil Tribes in Gujarat that God may use them as an instrument to reach out to these and many other

unreached people.

10 FRIDAY Pray for Safe India, Tamil Nadu. Pray that the Lord would bless their initiatives and bring glory to Himself and goodness for the people involved in this ministry.

11 SATURDAY Pray for all the staff of EFI. Pray for empowerment, guidance, and strength as they carry out their responsibilities. Pray for the needs of Evangelical Fellowship of India. Pray that God would continually provide and use this ministry for His glory.

12 SUNDAY Mother's Day. Thank God for all the godly mothers. Pray that their influence would grow and spread in their families and outside. Pray for all the mothers around you that they may be good and God-fearing mothers.

13 MONDAY Pray for Scripture Union India, Tamil Nadu. Pray for all the people involved in this ministry as they help others to mature in Christ through the spreading of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

14 TUESDAY Pray for Community of Nations in Uttarakhand. Pray that the Lord's blessings would be upon them so that they succeed in everything they do.

15 WEDNESDAY International Day of Families. Pray that God who had established the constitution of family, would nurture and strengthen every family. Pray that Christ would be the head of every family and He may be glorified.

16 THURSDAY Continue to pray for D6 Asia Evangelical Alliance Family Conference starting tomorrow. Pray for all the speakers and translators that their time with the participants will be meaningful. Pray also for all the logistics that everything will go well smoothly.

17 FRIDAY Pray for New Life Foundation, New Delhi. Pray that God would use them mightily to reach the unreached and bring healing to His people through them.

18 SATURDAY Pray for Soul Winning Mission, Manipur. Pray that many wandering souls would find peace and satisfaction as they hear the Gospel from this ministry.

19 SUNDAY Pray for those who are persecuted for their faith. Continue to pray that every individual would fearlessly practice their faith.

20 MONDAY Pray for Beersheba Church of God Society in Punjab. Pray that the church would feed

the needy both physically and spiritually with deep concern and care. May God provide all their needs as they serve His purpose.

21 TUESDAY Pray for Soul Winners Prayer Fellowship, New Delhi. Pray that the ministry would influence the youth group in a big way. Pray for God's empowerment and supply as they organized prayer ministries in and around New Delhi.

22 WEDNESDAY Pray for Seva Bharat, Telangana. Pray that the Lord would bless and multiply this ministry for the extension of His kingdom on earth.

23 THURSDAY Pray for Presbyterian Free Church in Madhya Pradesh. Pray that God would use this church as a channel of blessing both spiritual and physical and touch many lives.

24 FRIDAY Pray for World Impact Light the Nations Trust, Punjab. Pray for Holy Spirit's guidance and instruction on them so that they would become an agent of change in the world.

25 SATURDAY Pray for joy, peace, and unity in your church. Pray that every church member would love and serve others with humility.

26 SUNDAY Pray for personal and corporate revival for all the members of your church. Pray that the love for God's Word would increase greatly.

27 MONDAY Pray for Presbyterian Church in India (Reformed), Manipur. Pray for strength, sustenance, and stability as they serve God's church.

28 TUESDAY Pray for JNP Bethany Mission Welfare Society in Andhra Pradesh. Pray that the Lord would lead, guide, equip and use this ministry for His glory.

29 WEDNESDAY Pray for Revival Literature Fellowship at Karnataka. Pray that the ministry would focus to encourage people to receive Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. Pray for strength and commitment for those involved in this ministry.

30 THURSDAY Pray for North Bank Baptist Christian Association, Assam. Pray for new insights and zeal for this ministry. Pray for all their constituencies to actively shoulder and implement the mission vision. Pray for God's abundant blessings upon them.

31 FRIDAY Thank God for a fruitful month. Pray that God would use you mightily in the coming months too.

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**“As one whom his mother comforts,
so I will comfort you; you shall be
comforted in Jerusalem.”**

– Isaiah 66:13

HAPPY
Mother's
DAY



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