



So if the Son sets you free, you will be free
indeed. Jn 8:36

FREEDOM FROM CAPTIVITY

A series of messages preached by Bro. Dixon
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Freedom from captivity

Chapter 1

Seek God's Glory

Act 11:21: *“And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.” (KJV)*

Most of us would like to have promises from the Lord for our personal benefit – we desire that the Lord should protect us, lift us and bless us but instead, we need to yearn for the hand of the Lord to rest on us in a powerful way, so we can lead many people into the saving knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There are many people unable to experience this power of God in their lives, because they are in various kinds of bondages. Many are trying hard to give up habits that are binding them but are unable to do so.

What are the things that keep people in bondage?

Let's study the Bible to see some of the bondages that the Bible talks about.

2 Peter 2: 19 (GNT) talks about being *“slaves to destructive habits”*

Many people including believers are in bondage to various habits. They are aware that these habits could destroy them, their health sometimes, their families but are unable to break free. They try hard and make a resolve to give these up but are incapable of doing so.

Titus 3:3 (NLT) mentions those who are *“slaves to many kinds of lusts and pleasures.”*

A lot of people are in bondage to various kinds of lusts and pleasures.

Titus 2:3 (NIV) speaks about being *“addicted to alcohol”*

Today addiction to alcohol has become a huge menace in our society. Many who are aware of its ill effects, are seriously trying to give up the habit. They make a resolve, and even are able to break away from the habit for a while. In a short time, they are again overwhelmed by the desire and fall back into the habit. This can sometimes be a vicious cycle.

Galatians 6:4(ISV) speaks about being *“slaves to things that are not really gods at all”*

Before we knew the true and living God, many of us were enslaved to so called gods, that had nothing of the divine in them. People are sold out to some traditions that they hope will deliver them from their bondage.

1 Corinthians 7:23(BSB) speaks about being *“slaves of men”*

A lot of people are living in slavery to others. A classic example of this is how some men actually immolate themselves, because their leader or hero became sick and was hospitalised. Many youth are slaves emotionally to another person so much so they can't even think and function normally.

Romans 6:20 (NIV) speaks about those who are *“slaves to sin”*

Think about various other things that are also keeping people in bondage today. Many are imprisoned to drugs, gambling, pornography, social media, love of money, cinemas, serials etc. There are others who are slaves to anger, lies, lust and bitterness. There are many who are filled with bitterness, that they are unable and unwilling to forgive or relate to the ones who hurt them. When we give anybody or anything the place that is due to God alone, we become slaves to that thing or person, whatever that is.

So many people, including believers are trapped in some sort of bondage. Many are in despair, because they have tried so hard, to give up and break free but are unable to do so. There are others who have come into a personal relationship with Jesus and are still struggling with some secret sins. They are overwhelmed by them, and are unable to confess or be rid of them as they are not sure how others will perceive what they are struggling with.

So the question is, is there hope for deliverance from bondages that have tied us down? Here’s the good news to those who are in bondage and wondering if there is a way of escape.

When Jesus went to Nazareth His home town, he went to the synagogue and read from the Book of Isaiah as recorded in **Luke 4:18**, *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me **to proclaim release to the captives** and the regaining of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed...”* (NET)

Jesus came to break our yoke of slavery to every form of bondage. For those of us who feel, we are unable to be consistent in our walk with the Lord, and that we are continually falling into the same sin, there is the good news - Jesus is able to deliver us and set us free from all our captivity.

John 8:36 says. *“If therefore the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”* (ASV) and that’s the greatest news for anyone who is in any kind of bondage. Jesus is truly able to set us free from every form of slavery and sin. In order to appropriate this in our life we firstly, have to accept our problem, confess it to the Lord and decide to give it up, and seek the Lord for His intervention and help.

What should be our reason to seek to come out of our bondages?

There are several reasons why a person who is addicted or in bondage seeks to be delivered from the same. There are sometimes serious health issues due to an addiction, financial problems, family problems, fear, anxiety and very often a deep sense of guilt which may prompt someone to try hard to give up a particular habit or an issue that is binding them.

Here’s the most important reason that we should seek to be delivered from any sort of bondage that we are in. Paul says in **1 Corinthians 10:31**, *“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything to the glory of God.”* (GW)

So whatever we are involved with in our lives, the thought that should be foremost on our minds is, does what we do bring glory to God's name or is it in some way dishonouring Him. If in some way the things in our lives that have enslaved us are bringing dishonour to the Lord, we definitely need to get rid of them. We need to honour God not only through our singing, praying, preaching and teaching but in every little thing that we do.

The very first line of the Lord's Prayer that Jesus taught his disciples in **Matthew 6:9**, says, *"Our Father in heaven: May your holy name be honoured;"* (GNT)

The mandate is very clear. We need to honour God in every area of our life – our words, our relationships, the things we see and hear and do. God's word is very clear that nothing that is defiled will ever enter into the kingdom of God.

Psalms 115:1, *"Not to us, LORD, not to us, but to your name be given glory on account of your gracious love and faithfulness."* (ISV) We need to constantly remind ourselves that we need to be free from everything that enslaves us, and live in such a way that God's name is glorified through us.

Let's look at a very crucial incident that took place in the life of Moses and Aaron, towards the very end of their journey with the people of Israel from Egypt into the land of Canaan.

Numbers 20:10: *"Then Moses and Aaron assembled the community in front of the rock and said to them, "Listen, you rebels, must we bring water out of this rock for you?"* (GW)

Numbers 20:12: *"But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "You didn't trust me! You didn't show the Israelites how holy I am! So you will not bring this congregation into the land I'm giving them."*(GW)

The people of Israel were at the desert of Zin, and were complaining because there was no water for them or their animals. As Moses and Aaron sought the Lord, the Lord commands Moses to go and speak to the rock, and thereby bring water for the people to quench their thirst. Moses and Aaron were so frustrated with the people and their rebellion, that in anger, instead of speaking to the rock, he rebukes the people of Israel and then strikes the rock twice. Water did flow from the rock, and the people were satisfied that day, but Moses and Aaron had to face a serious consequence.

The Lord told them that both of them would never set foot into the promised- land, because they not only did not trust in the Lord but more importantly they failed to display God's holiness to the people of Israel. Though they led Israel for 40 long years, one single act of disobedience and dishonour to the Lord, prevented them from entering the promise land. It is indeed a warning to us that we need to honour the Lord in every area of our life. We need to desire to be set free, and live the life of holiness that the Lord aspires for each one of us.

It is absolutely true that if Jesus sets us free, we will truly be free indeed. It doesn't really matter how long we have lived in bondage to something, the Lord can set us free in a moment and help us live a life of freedom from every form of bondage and captivity in our lives.

Freedom from Captivity

Chapter 2

Source of Satisfaction

John 8:36, *“So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.”*(NRSV)

We looked in the previous chapter at various things that people are addicted to; drugs, alcohol, smoking, pornography and certain kinds of friendships and relationships that are not beneficial. We also saw that for many speaking lies was an issue and they are not even aware that it is a problem and have become habitual liars.

There are others who are held captive to bitterness, unforgiveness and hurts which they carry as a baggage. Still others are in bondage to their mobile phones, to social media. They either are constantly seeking approval from others or are enslaved to its obscene content. There's a word of caution in *Ecclesiastes 1:8 ...“the eye is not satisfied with seeing”* and there's always the desire for more and more. There are some others, who are even addicted to watching news on Television which they do so non-stop. Anger, fear and worry are some of the other things that people are also in bondage to. Many are struggling with tempers that are uncontrollable, while others are in constant fear and worry over every little problem.

Where does this bondage or captivity begin?

It most certainly did not begin at birth. No one is born with bondage or addiction but as people grow older, they very often pick up some sort of habit or addiction from someone or sometimes from a particular place they are associated with. It most often (for example drinking or smoking) begins with the desire to experiment something new or with the urge to be part of a peer group. Initially there is a combination of temporary pleasure along with distaste and disgust too but as time goes by the person slowly becomes enslaved to it. Once a person is addicted to a habit they will always find reasons to justify what they are enslaved to. Gradually what seemed to initially be under their control starts to have full control over their lives. At some point many come to the resolve that they can never quit the habit or addiction that they are tethered to.

However, if a person sincerely desires to quit the habit or addiction, they can surely do so by the grace of God. We need to bring every thought under the Lord's captivity and believe with all our heart the word of God which affirms this, *“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed!”* **John 8:36 (ISV)**

We saw in **Luke 4:18**, *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me **to proclaim release to the captives** and the regaining of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed....”* (NET) how the Lord Jesus came down to free us from every sort of bondage and captivity.

Jesus and the Samaritan Woman (John chapter 4)

John 4:7 *“There came a woman of Samaria to draw water; Jesus said unto her, give me to drink.” (JUB)*

Jesus is passing through Samaria and he sits down by a well as he is really tired. A Samaritan woman from the village comes to draw water from the well and she and Jesus engage in a conversation. When Jesus requested her to give him some water to drink as He was thirsty and tired, the Samaritan woman replied like this, *“How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, who am a woman of Samaria? For the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.”*

John 4:9 (KJV)

Usually if someone were to ask us for water we would simply answer yes or no. But if we look at this incident, the woman was overreacting to a simple request by Jesus. Generally a person in bondage will unnerve even in simple matters. They very often do this, so others don't really get to know who they are and what they are enslaved to. They are usually hiding their issues and want to appear good to others so they won't be found out.

The next thing she said to Jesus was, *“Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?”* **John 4:12 (NRSV)**

She was now distracting Jesus and started to talk about their traditions and her forefathers. She was in a way trying to get her identity from her past. We need to be cautious that we are not satisfied with just the mere traditions of men and neither should we gloat about our antecedents. There are some who are in addiction throughout the year and then they are quite contented with just abstaining for a short period of time, for example a fast of 40 days. We need to bear in mind that traditions can only help give temporary solution, but Jesus alone can bring about permanent change.

And then Jesus said to her, **John 4:13** *Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,”... (ISV)*

Jesus had to admonish her that the water from the well will never quench her thirst for ever. She would have drink this physical water many times a day to be satisfied. This is very similar to a person who is in an addiction. The habit is never satiated. There is a constant desire for more and the person is never fully satisfied. A person who is enslaved to something will never be appeased no matter how much they have of it.

Jesus now comes to the main issue the woman was facing. In **John 4:16 -18**, *“He told her, “Go and call your husband, and come back here. The woman answered him, “I don't have a husband.” Jesus told her, “You are quite right in saying, ‘I don't have a husband,’¹⁸ because you have had five husbands, and the man you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true.” (ISV)*

The Samaritan woman had a moral problem, she had lived with 5 husbands and was now living with a man who was not her husband. Jesus knew exactly what her issue was. There is

nothing that can be hidden from the Lord. She appeared good on the outside but Jesus knew her real struggle. God will not judge us on the basis of how well we behave in church or society, but in our personal secret life. In her personal life she was in bondage.

Many things today have become acceptable in society. Divorce and remarriage are no longer frowned upon, but see what the Lord says in **Malachi 2:16** "*I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel. (GNB)*

Jesus then affirms to her in **John 4:14**, "*But anyone who drinks the water I give will never be thirsty again. The water I give people will be like a spring flowing inside them. It will bring them eternal life.*" (ERV)

A man of God explained it this way. A person had no source of water in their home, but kept going to various other houses nearby to get water. But a friend who had come to their house told them of a stream right in their compound and when they dug a well, they had water in abundance and all their needs were met without having to get out of their house. What a joy!

That's what Jesus promises to us if we receive the Lord in our life and receive the abundant life he gives. Out of our life will flow rivers of living water. We will be a great blessing to others.

In **Isaiah 55:2** we are admonished, "*Why spend your money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in rich food.*" (ISV)

Jesus alone can give us peace and real satisfaction. None of our bondages can ever do that. Jesus is the only one who can truly set us free us from every bondage, and help us overcome every form of addiction. It is certainly not God's will that we should live under bondage. As long as we live in bondage, we can never fulfil the purposes of God in our life. We need to lead a life that is pleasing to the Lord. He is the only one who can make everything new and enable us to lead the abundant life He has designed for us.

Freedom from Captivity

Chapter 3

One Little Weakness

We read in Act 26:18, “You are to open their eyes and turn them from the darkness to the light and from the power of Satan to God, so that through their faith in me they will have their sins forgiven and receive their place among God's chosen people.” (GNB)

As Saul was on his way to Damascus, with the cruel intent to persecute those who believed in Jesus, he had this dramatic encounter with the Lord Jesus where he was converted and transformed from Saul to Paul. At this point, when Saul asked Jesus what he was expected to do, the above words from Acts 26:18, was God’s specific command to Paul.

There are four aspects of this verse that we will consider, that will give us an explanation of what happens to a person when they are in any sort of bondage.

1. They are blinded by sin

A person in bondage the Bible says is blinded to his condition and so he keeps doing the same thing over and over again. If a man falls into a pit once, it will be considered a mistake, but if he were to fall into the same pit repeatedly, it would make one surmise that he is unsighted. Many of us are not even aware that we are living in enslavement to many things. Our prayer to the Lord is that He would intervene, break loose and set us free from every form of bondage.

2. They are under the power of Satan

We saw in the previous chapters that addictions and bondages are varied. . When we continue to fall into the same sin over and over again we are allowing Satan to enslave us and keep us in bondage. If we seek to be delivered, we need to desire to be rid of the enslavement and make it our highest goal to be like Jesus. It is always good for us to ask in every situation we are placed, ‘What would Jesus do?’ and aspire to do the same. This transformation doesn’t happen overnight, but every day as we pray, read and meditate on the word and obey the Lord on an ongoing basis this change becomes a reality.

3. Their sins are not forgiven

Also many people who are in bondage are constantly reminded of their past failures and secret sins that they feel deserve punishment. They have a sense of helplessness, and come to the conclusion that they can never be released from their condition. What happens as a result is that, they filled with a deep sense of guilt and shame, and carry a heavy burden of remorse and degradation.

4. They are not in fellowship with God's people

It is also very evident that when a person is living in sin or is in bondage, they will never want to be in fellowship with other believers. They may even be members of the church but they will choose to be distant and will not be in close communion with the people of God.

The very purpose of God choosing Saul and radically changing him to Paul was that he would be instrumental in turning people from darkness to light. By placing our faith in Jesus, the Lord assures us that our sins are forgiven, that we are set free from all our guilt and shame, to live a holy life here on earth, and we are also promised the assurance of heaven. We are in the true sense transported from darkness to light, from the dominion of Satan to the Kingdom of God, can come into true fellowship with other believers and become vibrant members of the body of Christ.

A strong man with one weakness

The people of Israel were being tormented by the Philistines. They often came into the Israelite territory and plundered their fields. The people of Israel cry out in anguish and the Lord raises a mighty man named Samson.

God is a God of restoration and He is also our faithful God. Frequently when we are in distress, at a point of loss and call out to Him, the Lord comes to redeem us and restore back to us all that we have lost.

As we study the life of Samson we will understand how he was enslaved by sin. We will also be able to analyse our own lives and see how we can overcome similar temptations and bondages in our own lives. Samson was a man called and chosen by the Lord to deliver Israel and whenever the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, he was so filled with strength that no one could stand before him. But sadly Samson the strong man also had a weakness. In the book of Judges we read like this.

Judges 14:1, 2 *"One day when Samson was in Timnah, one of the Philistine women caught his eye. When he returned home, he told his father and mother, "A young Philistine woman in Timnah caught my eye. I want to marry her. Get her for me." (NLT)*

Samson goes to a city and sees a philistine woman, and immediately wants to marry her. He knew nothing about her but wanted to marry her and the only reason he wanted her was just that she caught his eye and he desired to have her. He stubbornly pursued this relationship, and in the end Samson's marriage to the Philistine woman ended in total failure.

Ecclesiastes 10:1, talks about how one dead fly can cause a bottle of perfume to stink, no matter how much effort the person took to prepare it. So also a small sin can cause big trouble in our lives as it did in the life of Samson.

Many young people today are also choosing their life partners this way. They see someone and fall in love, often what is termed 'love at first sight' and generally without knowing

anything about the person are ready to take the plunge. The choice is frequently made entirely on the basis of the outward appearance. Young people need to be prudent in this matter. The kind of person you choose as a life partner will decide the quality of your family life. Our partners in marriage should be God's choice and compatible to us. We must therefore be careful to make the right choice.

It is important for parents to pray for the spouses our children will marry in future. We can start praying for our children when they are very young, that they will make the right choice, so the appropriate people are joined into our families. Marriage was God's idea and families are his plan so it is always best to consult with the Lord before we make that decision. Once we are married there is no option to opt out. If you realise the person you married is not the right person, you need to pray and by your life and good deeds lead them to the Lord.

Marriages are not fairy tales that have happy endings all the time. For a marriage to work well both the husband and wife must work hard and do their part to make the marriage a happy one. Many people think that if the marriage doesn't work we can opt out, divorce and find another partner. But on the basis of God and His word, divorce and remarriage are no options for a believer. A husband and wife need to fulfil certain marital duties to each other. We have to do our best to make our marriage work. Husbands are instructed to love their wife and the wife is taught to submit to her husband. Many children are following in their parent's footsteps and choosing to quit their marriages even for simple reasons. Instead we need to pray, work hard and do our best to make our marriage work.

Judges 16:1, *"Now Samson went to Gaza, and there he saw a loose woman and went in to her". (BBE)*

The next thing Samson did was go to Gaza and there he set eyes on a loose woman.

Our eyes if we notice are responsible for a lot of enslavements. The Bible says if our eye is holy our whole body will be holy. (**Matthew 6:22**)

Later we see in **Judges 16:4**, *"Now after this, he was in love with a woman in the valley of Sorek, named Delilah."* (BBE)

Samson was so enslaved to this love for women, that he was making the same mistake over and over again. The very women whom Samson was so in love with were also the cause for his ruin.

Judges 14:17, *"she nagged him"* (GNB) – this was the wife who once pleased his eyes.

Judges 16:16, *"Delilah started nagging and pestering him day after day, until he couldn't stand it any longer. (CEV)-* This was the woman he loved so much.

Both the women Samson so longed to have, nagged him to the point of utter desperation.

Let's see what happened to Samson as a result of his friendship with Delilah. **Judges 16:21**, *"The Philistines grabbed Samson and poked out his eyes. They took him to the prison in Gaza and chained him up. Then they put him to work, turning a millstone to grind grain."* (CEV)

What happened was tragic. The philistines captured Samson, took him to Gaza the very place where he saw the loose woman, and the first thing they did was to gouge out his eyes. They chain him up, imprison him and force him to grind grain. The uncontrolled eyes of Samson were now removed. Now as he groped in his blindness, he must have been constantly reminded of the sins he committed with those very eyes. Here was a strong man who was called and anointed by the Spirit of God, called to be a deliverer of Israel, now in bondage literally and totally separated from all his family and his own people.

Today many young children who are in their early teens are also falling into this trap. As parents we need to guide our children in the right way. We need to pray for our children that they will be protected. We should not be careless about the matters pertaining to our children. There is also much obscene content in every form of media. As Parents we have a responsibility to guide and help our children to view the right things. We must set an example for our children. It is better to nip a habit or an addiction in the bud than to let it grow and become a problem to us or else we will be ensnared by the very thing.

Notice how sin will always thrive in darkness. Just think about it – things that grow in the dark are not good things – they are harmful thing - for example fungus, mould etc. That is why God created light at the very beginning. All the secret things that we hide in the darkness of our hearts will surely bring us much trouble. Whatever those secrets are, we need to bring them out openly to the Lord, confess and forsake them. Only when Jesus the true light comes into our life, will all the darkness of sin will flee.

The Samaritan Woman – from darkness to light

In the last chapter we saw how Jesus met a woman from Samaria near Jacob's well. Jesus was sitting there exhausted when the woman came to draw water from the well. She came all alone, probably not wanting to meet with anyone when she encounters Jesus. Jesus asked her to do something that really stunned her.

In John 4:16-17, *Jesus told her, "Go and bring your husband." The woman answered, "I don't have a husband."* (CEV)

John 4:18, *"You have had five husbands, and the man you have now is not your husband: that was truly said."* (BBE)

When Jesus asked this woman to go and bring her husband, he very well knew all about her past. He knew that she had five husbands earlier and that the man she was living with was not her husband. What she was keeping back in her life as a secret, the Lord brought into the open.

As long as we hide our sins, and cover them up, sin will continue to grow. If we want to come out of our bondage, we need to first accept our situation, confess our sin and repent

of it. We need to truly desire to let go of it and need to bring what is in the darkness into the light of the Lord.

When Jesus brought out all her secrets into the open all her inhibitions were gone and what the woman did something amazing.

In **John 4:28-29**, *“The woman left her water jar, and ran back into town. She said to the people, me and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! Could he be the Messiah?” (GNB)*

She left her water jar and forgot the purpose for which she had come to the well in the first place and ran into the village to bring everyone to meet Jesus. As long as a person is living in sin and in darkness, he or she will live in isolation from society. That is why the woman came all alone, but once her sins were brought into the open she lost all shame, fear and self-consciousness and had no qualms about bringing all of her acquaintances to see Jesus. Only when every bondage in our life is broken, can we be useful instruments in the hands of the Lord. She testifies to the whole village *“come and see, the person who told me everything about me. Could this be the Christ?”*

We may hide many things from others. As little children we may recall how we would do wrong and then get caught because we didn't know how to cover up. However, as we grow older we learn to cover up very well, so we don't get caught. We should sincerely ask the Lord to deliver us from every form of bondage so we are set free. Only as we search our hearts and check to see what is the thing that we are enslaved to and bring it into the light of Christ, we will be able to lead a victorious life.

Here's the word of God to us from **Proverbs 28:13**, *“You will never succeed in life if you try to hide your sins. Confess them and give them up; then God will show mercy to you.” (GNB)*

Freedom from Captivity

Chapter 4

Two Masters

We read like this in **Matthew 6:24**, *“No man is able to be a servant to two masters: for he will have hate for the one and love for the other, or he will keep to one and have no respect for the other. You may not be servants of God and of wealth.”* (BBE)

In the above mentioned verse, Jesus talks about two masters – one is God and the other money and wealth and His teaching was resolute, no one can serve two masters. The reason for this is that it is humanly impossible for anyone to serve two masters at the same time. Therefore, what countless people do, including believers is they let God be their master only on Sundays and let money have mastery over them for the rest of the week. They also try to juggle and balance their allegiance to God and money and eventually make them two distinct entities that will never intersect. However, the Lord establishes to us through His word that this sort of dual loyalty is certainly impossible as we will end up loving one and hating the other. It is indeed true that if we are a friend of God, by default we become an enemy of the world and vice versa if we don't become an enemy of the world, we are not a friend of God. If we find ourselves taking God for granted, neglecting the fellowship of believers and prioritising other things it is a definite pointer that we are serving some other master and not God Himself.

We have been looking at various things that enslave people in the previous chapters and also how the Lord desires for each one of us to be set free from every bondage. The assurance we receive from the Lord as we studied earlier is that, *“if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.”* **John 8:36** (NRSV)

Money a bad master

One of the important areas that Jesus spoke a lot about was the enslavement to money and material possessions. Most people will not like to acknowledge that they are enthralled by money and material things. Money is essential for our basic needs and daily living, but we should be wary to not let money become our master. When money starts to dictate how we live and what we do, then money becomes our master. Many believers are lukewarm only because they are trying hard to please God and at the same time have also set their hearts on loving money.

The perils of loving money

We read in **1Timothy 6:10**, *“For the love of money is a source of all kinds of evil. Some have been so eager to have it that they have wandered away from the faith and have broken their hearts with many sorrows.”* (GNB)

If we delve deep into the matter we will very often find that the root of many problems is money. Having money and being careful in spending money is okay, but if money is all that is on our mind and we are obsessed by it then it is definitely a problem. 1 Timothy 6:10 is

very categorical that the love for money is the root problem for all sorts of evil and when money becomes our master we will surely go far away from the Lord. The outcome has also been clearly spelt out – many having been driven by this desire to get rich have pierced themselves with many sorrows. We may have heard and read numerous accounts of people who wanting to multiply their money overnight, have trusted in various schemes and were cheated of everything they invested.

Judas Iscariot – mastered by money, he betrays His Master

Let's look at **Luke 6:12 – 13**, *“At that time Jesus went up a hill to pray and spent the whole night there praying to God. When day came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he named apostles:”*

The Lord Jesus spent a whole night in prayer before he chose his twelve disciples. All of them spent three and half years with Jesus. They were witnesses to all the miraculous signs and wonders Jesus performed. However Judas Iscariot who was one of the chosen twelve, let money become his master.

Look at what Judas Iscariot was doing in **Matthew 26:14 – 15**, *“Then one of the twelve disciples---the one named Judas Iscariot went to the chief priests and asked, “**What will you give me if I betray Jesus to you?**” They counted out thirty silver coins and gave them to him.”* (GNB)

Though Judas Iscariot had been with Jesus, he did not recognize Him as his master but instead was enslaved by his love for money. He went and negotiated with the chief priests and elders and sets a price money of 30 pieces of silver to betray the one who had chosen him, loved him, taught him and cared for him for three and half years. The deal was clinched but the moment Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss, he was so filled with regret, and shame and remorse that he actually ran back and literally threw the money back at the ones who gave it to him. Sadly it was too late. They refused to accept it and the money that so captivated and controlled Judas did not benefit him or anyone else. The end of Judas was tragic and pathetic.

The question that Judas asked the chief priest and elders was, *“what will you give me?”* He forgot the fact that there is nothing that the world can give that the Lord cannot give in better measure. As long as Judas was with Jesus all his needs were met by the Lord, but still his heart was not content and was set on acquiring more money.

This is a word of caution for everyone, even for those of us who claim to be walking with God. Judas was with the best master, Jesus Himself, and was chosen with much prayer but he deliberately chose to go after money which mastered and destroyed his life. As believers if we can learn to not run after the worldly blessings but rather run to the giver of every blessing the Lord Himself, He will take care of our every need. He will satisfy and provide everything in perfect time as He perceives our needs even before we know them.

A beautiful example of God's provision is from the life of the people of Israel while they were wandering in the wilderness, even before they could cry to the Lord to quench their

thirst, He not only provided the rock from which water gushed forth but also the tree that could turn the bitter water (Mara) to sweet. The Lord has a solution to every problem we face even before it comes to us.

As parents one of the reasons why we are so sensitive to the needs of our children and take such good care of them is because they are our own. How much more will the Lord take care of us, the ones whom He created in His own image.

Francis Bacon said it this way ***'Money is a good servant but a bad master.'*** Once a man comes under the mastery of money every part of his being (his thoughts, his words and his deeds) will be controlled by money and sadly the only reason he will want to relate with others is if it will turn out to be beneficial to him. When money masters or enslaves us it will turn us into selfish people.

When Self Enslaves

1 Kings 21: 1-2, *"Near King Ahab's palace in Jezreel there was a vineyard owned by a man named Naboth. One day Ahab said to Naboth, "Let me have your vineyard; it is close to my palace, and I want to use the land for a vegetable garden. I will give you a better vineyard for it or, if you prefer, I will pay you a fair price."(GNB)*

1 Kings 21:4, *"Ahab went home, depressed and angry over what Naboth had said to him. He lay down on his bed, facing the wall, and would not eat."(GNB)*

King Ahab was the King of Israel everything in the kingdom belonged to him. One day he noticed the vineyard of his neighbor Naboth and coveted after it. His plan was to take Naboth's vineyard and convert it into a vegetable garden. When Naboth refused to sell the vineyard to Naboth, Ahab throws a tantrum. His wife Jezebel who was a wicked woman plots a treacherous plan, kills Naboth and gets the vineyard for Ahab. Ahab was so consumed by self, that he coveted a poor man's vineyard. Both Ahab and Jezebel faced the Lord's Judgement and a tragic end.

Today sadly, even among many siblings there is rivalry over a small piece of property. The reason for this is that brotherly love has been overtaken by self and selfishness. Many have taken their own siblings to court. We need to let go of our rights, and let the Lord give us the needed justice at the right time. If we get consumed by self, we can be certain that it will destroy us in the end.

Let's read **James 5:4,** *"You have not paid any wages to those who working your fields. Listen to their complaints! The cries of those who gather in your crops have reached the ears of God, the Lord Almighty. (GNB)*

The Lord expects us to be people who are just and fair, especially to those who work for us or serve us. Many employers hold back the wages that is due to the one who has labored for them. They don't pay as promised, procrastinate payment, make excuses and thereby cheat the poor. Let's never hold back the wage that is rightly due to someone else, for if we do

the Lord who is our master is watching and he will definitely take up the cause for those we have wronged and we will face due judgement.

Choose the Good Master

Mark 4:37- 38, *“And a great storm of wind came up, and the waves came into the boat, so that the boat was now becoming full. And he himself was in the back of the boat, sleeping on the cushion: and they, awaking him, said, **Master**, is it nothing to you that we are in danger of destruction?” (BBE)*

It is striking to note that though Jesus was in the same boat as the disciples, they were asking Jesus *“Master, don’t you care that we are going to drown.”* It seems as though the disciples were teaching Jesus how to worry. They forgot that the good Master was in their boat and there was absolutely no reason for them to worry, fear or fret as He was in full control.

It never does imply that if we are a believer in the Lord Jesus we will never face any storms in our life, but on the contrary we have the assurance that the Lord is with us in the midst of all our storms, He is in control and nothing will happen to us without His knowledge.

In another incident where a man brings his son who is dumb to Jesus in **Mark 9:17**, *“And one of the multitude answered him, **Master**, I brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit ;”(RV)*

When Lazarus died and Jesus came to visit Mary and Martha, Martha runs to Mary and says in, **John 11:28**, *“And having said this, she went away and said secretly to her sister Mary, The **Master** is here and has sent for you.” (BBE)*

If we were to contemplate on all the above mentioned miracles, none of them could be accomplished with money or self. No master who has money or even if you paid him money can calm a storm, make a dumb man speak or raise the dead. Only the good and great master of the universe, the Lord Jesus can perform these astounding miracles in our lives. If we trust the good master completely instead of trusting in money or self, we can accomplish everything with His help and strength.

Let us decide to allow Jesus to our true master and not concede money or self to take over His place. Jesus cares for us more than anybody else in this world. He is willing to take care of our every need. Therefore, it is only appropriate that we allow the Lord to be our master. Let Him be our driving force. Let Him have the first place. He is and will always be our Best and Good Master.

Freedom from Captivity

Chapter 5

Run Well

The Apostle Paul writing to the Church in Corinth admonishes them this way. He says to them in **1 Corinthians 9:24 -25**, *“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run, that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.”* (ESV)

As we take a closer look at the above mentioned verses, there are four important aspects that stand out. Probably as Paul observed groups of athletes preparing for a race the following features captured his mind. The first aspect Paul is talking about is that this is a running race, the second, that there are the participants in the race, the third, is the fact that every participant needs to exercise self-control and the fourth, that there is a crown waiting at the end of this race for those who run well.

Nothing distracts an athlete who is preparing for a race. He is completely focused and his only aim is to win the race and receive the crown. In ancient times, when an athlete won a race, they were given a beautiful wreath made of leaves to celebrate their victory. However, the wreath they received would probably last only for a few days and then fade away.

If we were to observe the athletes who participate in a race we may have noticed that they wear light clothes, they often keep their hair short and the reasons for this kind of discipline is that they do not want anything to hinder them or their speed when they are in a race. They are also very selective and controlled with the kind of food they eat, so they can keep their bodies healthy and fit. They will exercise self-control in every area of their life so that they can run the race really well.

If we were to compare ourselves with this indirect representation, we will understand that each one of us are participants in this race of life. We are all running towards a goal and our reward is the crown of righteousness that the Lord has promised to all those who run and finish well. However, in order to attain this imperishable crown, we need to exercise self-control in every area of our life. This is not a compulsion, but a daily discipline and choice. We also constantly remind ourselves that whatever the world offers us will eventually fade away. Every trophy we receive in this world is only temporary, and will vanish someday but the crown the Lord assures us will last into eternity.

The question is how we can run this race well, so as to be victorious and receive the crown. We have looked in detail at various areas in which people are being enslaved. One is not in bondage only to habits like drinking, smoking etc., but is enslaved even if they are struggling in areas like controlling anger, hatred, and jealousy too. To run this race well we need to break free from all these yokes that bind us, pull us down and prevent us from fulfilling our full potential and purposes of God in our life.

How should we run this race of life?

Run with a vision

Habakkuk 2:2, *“And the LORD answered me: “Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it.” (ESV)*

The Lord commanded the prophet Habakkuk to clearly write the vision He gave him on tablets, so that the people could read and understand it and run with the same. The vision that was planted in his mind, was to be written out so the people could comprehend the vision clearly and run with it.

Many companies have what they call a ‘vision statement’ that portrays what they would like to see happen in the future. For instance way back in 1975, when Microsoft was just launching, they had a vision statement that read like this ‘A computer on every Desk’. When they first floated the company this was not even a possibility as computers in those days were huge and usually confined to a room, the computers were also very expensive and not affordable for common man. However, we see that 44 years later, it is indeed a reality and almost every home and office have a computer or a laptop.

The vision that the Lord has given to us is that we will have eternal life and receive the unfading crown that He has in store for us and we are all running towards it. We cannot perceive this with our temporal eyes, but we run by faith because we received this vision from the Lord. We need to run with this vision.

If we study the life of Joseph in the Bible, we realize that he faced untold troubles from a very young age. The heights of it was when he is faithfully serving as a head slave in the house of Potiphar, and Potiphar’s wife starts to take notice of how handsome Joseph was, and entices him to have an affair with her. On one such day of being tempted, Joseph leaves his coat and flees from her presence. Regrettably Joseph faces prison for an offence he never committed. The only reason Joseph ran that day was because he knew that the Lord had chosen him and had great plans to honour him and with this vision so clearly etched in Joseph’s heart, he did not let anything hinder the Lord from fulfilling the same.

If we desire to effectuate the vision that the Lord has for our lives, it is necessary for us to like Joseph literally run away from all those things that would ensnare us. Let us choose to run away from hate, anger, bitterness, unholy things and anything else that would prevent us from attaining that vision.

In 2 Timothy 4:7-8, Paul Says, *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day.”(NRSV)*

We often see this verse on a grave stone, but we should truly make this verse our theme and vision. We must desire to fight the good fight of faith and not give room for the devil to trap and enslave us. Paul could boldly say, I have kept the faith and I will receive the crown of righteousness that the Lord has promised for everyone who runs and finishes well. This is the primary reason why we run with a vision.

Run with a purpose

2 Kings 4:24, *"She saddled the donkey and said to her servant, 'Let's go. And don't slow down unless I tell you to.' Don't stop.... run...."* (CEV)

This is the incident that happened in Shunem. There was a notable woman in this city who got acquainted with the prophet Elisha. Every time Elisha passed by she would invite him home for a meal. Soon she and her husband understood that Elisha was a prophet of God and wanted to honour him. So they build a small room on their terrace, furnish it and invite Elisha to stay there whenever he passed through. Elisha was so thankful to the woman, that he asked her if there was anything he could do for her in return for her kindness.

She mentioned nothing but the servant informs Elisha that the woman was childless and that her husband was old. Elisha called the woman, and promised her that the Lord would bless her with a child within a year and sure enough as the prophet spoke the woman did have a baby boy within a year.

When we honour those who serve the Lord, He will honour us and the word of the prophet of God will never fail.

However, the little boy suddenly took ill and died. The Shunamite woman, took the child laid him on Elisha's bed in the up stair room and ran to bring the prophet. That is when she instructed her servant in **2 Kings 4:24** not to stop anywhere but rush ahead to the prophet. She was running with a purpose and her sole purpose was to bring the prophet home, so her son could be raised from the dead.

She clung to Elisha's feet and begged him to come and raise her dead son. Elisha sent his servant ahead of him with his staff and instructed him to place it on the dead boy. However, she did not give up but begged Elisha to come with her. She refused to leave the place without the prophet. The servant rushed ahead to the room and placed the staff on the dead boy, but nothing happened. The boy remained dead. Finally Elisha reached the room and stretched himself on the boy a couple of times and the little boy was raised to life.

There was only one purpose on this Shunamite woman's mind and that was to see her dead son raised to life. She would not go home until the prophet accompanied her, for she knew only then that her purpose of running to the prophet would be accomplished.

All of us must discern God's purpose for our lives and run with it. However, we should never go anywhere or do anything without the Lord going along with us. Many people have ruined their lives because they chose those paths and places where the presence of the Lord cannot come. The Lord must accompany us at every lap of this race we run, only can we comply with His purposes for our life.

Paul says in **1 Corinthian 9:26**, *"So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air;"* (NRSV)

Paul explains how he runs this race Jesus set forth for him with aim and purpose. Our life should be so purposeful and different that those around us should desire to be like us and should aspire to follow the Lord Jesus.

Naomi is a fine example of a woman who though was displaced from her home and was a stranger in the land of Moab, a land filled with idolatry, she was so committed to the Lord and her life was so exemplary that her daughter-in-law Ruth said to her, *"your people will be my people and your God will be my God."* **Ruth 1:16** and desired to be like her and follow the God she followed.

We should be those filled with such a purpose that those who relate with us would be eager to be like us and follow the Lord we serve.

Run with all your strength

In **Genesis 19:17**, *"Then one of the angels said, "Run for your lives! Don't look back and don't stop in the valley. Run to the hills, so that you won't be killed."* (GNB)

Lot, his wife and two daughters lived in the land of Sodom. The sin of Sodom was so great, that the Lord could bear it no longer and decided to destroy the city with fire and Sulphur. Though Lot lived in this sinful city, he remained a righteous man and God being a just God wanted to save Lot and his family from the fiery destruction. That is when the Lord sent his angels, and they literally drag Lot, his wife and daughters out of the city. The command of the angels to them was "run for your lives" or in other words run with all your strength, and run to the hills, to save yourselves from this impending danger. Sadly, however, Lot's wife decided to look back and she turned into a pillar of salt.

We can receive encouragement and inspiration from Lot's life to know that it is possible for us to be righteous in this unrighteous world. Lot was able to live this way at a time when the power of the Holy Spirit was not available to him, how much more we when we are empowered by the Holy Spirit of God to lead a holy life. With God's strength we can live a holy life in an unholy world.

Lot's wife on the other hand is an example for us to be cautious how we live the life that the Lord has called us to. She was actually dragged out of a sinful place to go to a place of freedom, but she chose to look back. A word of caution to all of us who are saved and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ to keep going strong and not give in to temptation and sin that could destroy us as it did Lot's wife. Once the Lord has saved us from depravity and sin, we should be circumspect not to get pulled back into the same sinful habits.

Genesis 12:4, *"When Abram was seventy-five years old, he started out from Haran, as the LORD had told him to do; and Lot went with him."* (GNB)

When we look at the background to this incident, we will realize where Lot actually made a wrong choice that landed him in Sodom. When God called Abraham to leave his country and his people and go to the place that he had promised, Lot also gladly accompanied him. God was blessing Lot because of Abraham and as their wealth increased there arose a misunderstanding between the herdsmen of Abraham and the herdsmen of Lot. Abraham

decided it was good for Lot and him to part so they can be at peace and so Abraham gives Lot the freedom to choose from the land whichever part that he thought was best. Lot looks at all the greenery and decided to move towards Sodom. Lot's life took turn for the worst. He slowly moves into this city and later becomes a leader in this sinful city. The Lord in His grace saved Lot and his family but unfortunately he lost his wife. What happened as a result was that his daughters did what was detestable to the Lord.

Let us not make decisions based on what our eyes see, but make right decisions by waiting on the Lord. Often the place where there is sin will look very pleasing the eyes, but we need to keep in mind that even if we are in a desert, the place of safety is always the one where the Lord is with us. We must be careful whom we associate with and those whom we are friends with. We must choose to join with those who will help us grow in the Lord and not be affiliated with those who will lead us away from the Lord.

Lot's life also is an admonition to us that if we don't make right associations, we not only affect ourselves but also our families and especially our children. Let us decide to follow the Lord wholeheartedly and not be entangled with the things of this world.

Isaiah 40:31 says *"But those who wait on the LORD, Shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."*(NKJV)

When we truly wait on the Lord, He will strengthen us and help us to run this race well and strong.

As we run this race that the Lord has set for us, let us run with a vision, let us run to fulfil His purpose for our lives and let us run with all the strength that He provides. If we do so we will surely receive that imperishable crown that the Lord has promised to us and we will be free of every single sin that binds and entangles us on this earth. May God give us grace to run well and receive the everlasting crown He has in store for us.

Freedom from Captivity

Chapter 6

Repent

Matthew 3:1-2: *“In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (RSV)*

Matthew 4:17: *“From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (RSV)*

As we study both of these above mentioned verses, we will realize that Jesus and John the Baptist who was the forerunner of Jesus, preached a very similar message of repentance, as they both fully grasped the urgency of the message they preached.

The last book of the Old Testament is Malachi and the first book of the New Testament is Matthew. In our Bibles there is only a page separating them, but in reality the period between Malachi and Matthew was 400 years. This was a period of total silence where there was absolutely no word from God. The revelation of God and His son Jesus commences again from the Gospel of Matthew. The question is, ‘What transpired in this lengthy period when the Lord chose not to speak or reveal Himself in any way to His people?’

In the Old Testament, God had commanded Solomon to build a temple, and the only reason was, that God wanted it to be a place where He met with the people and the people gathered together to meet with Him. The temple was built with several specifications – importantly it had the Outer court, Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. The only one permitted to enter the Most Holy Place was the High Priest and that too only at a time specified by the Lord, having followed several regulations as set by the Lord Himself. If anyone entered the Most Holy Place irreverently, they were instantly punished with death. However, as the years passed by, the people forgot the primary purpose of why the temple of God was built.

In this period of 400 years when the Lord chose to remain silent, everything in the temple continued as it always had. The rituals of worship, sacrifices, feasts and festivals were carried out with regularity, but the dismal part was that the Lord was not in it.

We looked at the church of Laodicea in the last Chapter, how the Lord was standing outside the church and knocking. Everything was going on as usual inside the church but the tragedy was that they had in actuality kept the Lord standing outside. He had no part in anything that was going on inside the church.

This could be sadly portrayed as the situation of the church today as well. We pride ourselves with our huge buildings and follow all the traditions, but have lost and forgotten the very purpose for which the Lord instituted the Church in the first place. It would be a sombre thought for us to know that the Lord is often not welcomed into our churches, but has been kept outside seeking to gain entry.

Let's read, **Mark 11:17**, *"Then he taught them by saying, "Scripture says, 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations,' but you have turned it into a gathering place for thieves."* (GW)

The above mentioned words are the words of Jesus. This is first and foremost "His" (God's) house. Secondly, it is a place of worship for all people and not an exclusive place for one particular language group or regional group. The church on earth is a representation of how things are going to be in heaven. In heaven there will be people from every tribe, language and people groups. Thirdly, it is written that His house is a 'House of Prayer' for all nations, but sorrowfully it has become a 'Den of Thieves.'

If one were to compare the 'House of God' with a 'Den of Thieves' here's what it will look like. Firstly, the House of God is a place of light, but a den of thieves is usually a dark and shady place. Secondly, the ones who come to the House of God, come together for prayer, God is in their midst and He answers their prayers whereas the primary reason robbers get together, is to connive evil and they are ruled by Satan and his schemes. Thirdly, everything is open in the House of God whereas things are kept secretive among a group of thieves. Fourthly, the House of God is for all people but the Den of Thieves is for an exclusive lot of wicked people. Finally, God reigns in His House whereas the devil rules among the Den of Thieves, because their purpose is only to loot, kill and destroy.

The Lord Jesus and John the Baptist came and preached the message of repentance because the key to entering the kingdom of God is repentance. Many people have a faulty understanding of the word repentance. A lot of confusion in our lives will be cleared if we understand the true meaning of repentance.

We will search the Bible to see where this word 'repentance' first appears.

Repentance is to feel sorry

Genesis 6:6, *"And the LORD repented that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart."* (WBT)

1 Samuel 15:11, *"I have repented that I caused Saul to reign for king, for he hath turned back from after Me, and My words he hath not performed;"* (YLT)

The above two passages clearly depict how God felt on two important occasions. One, when evil increased on the earth the Lord repented or in other words felt sorry that He had created mankind. In the second instance, the Lord chose Saul to be King over Israel, but when Saul rebelled and disobeyed the Lord, the Lord felt remorse that He had even chosen him to be the King of Israel.

For instance, if a parent were to admit their child into a prestigious college, with great hopes that he or she will excel and come out with flying colours, and if for some reason the child discontinued the course, the parent's heart will be filled with untold sadness and disappointment. They would probably be filled with sadness and regret. In other words they would feel so sorry that they sought admission in the first place.

The first step of repentance is for one to truly feel sorry for the wrongs they have done.

In **Matthew 26:75**, *“Peter remembered what Jesus had said: “Before a rooster crows, you will say three times that you don’t know me.” Then Peter went outside and cried bitterly.”*(GW)

When Peter denied the Lord as the Lord predicted and the rooster crowed, he was so filled with remorse that He had denied the Lord whom he loved so much, that he went out and wept bitterly because he felt extremely sorry for his disloyalty to the Lord.

Each one of us must come to a place where we truly feel sorry for all the things that we have done wrong, both against God and against others. We approach the Lord with a penitent heart and feel remorse for all our wrong doings – all of our erring thoughts, words, deeds, choices and decisions. Only when we do so can we find entry into the Kingdom of God.

Repentance is Returning Back to God

In **Luke 15:17**, we read *“But when he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired workers have food overflowing, but here I am dying of hunger!’”* (TLV)

In the story of the Prodigal son, he started off from his Father’s house with plenty but after he squandered all of it he came to a place of total emptiness – a situation where he had no love, no mercy, no safety, no food, no shelter but one of want and loneliness. Only then he came to his senses, and realized all that he had forfeited when he chose to rebel and walk away from his father and his family.

It is appropriate that we often analyse ourselves to see why we have landed up in certain situations that have caused us emptiness, trouble or lack of peace. We must intently search our hearts to find out where we have gone wrong, and seek to set it right. Repentance is feeling sorry for our wrong doings and turning back to God. Repentance is a total change of heart – a complete turn over. Repentance is a matter of the heart and the acts will be evident but it is primarily a change of heart in the first place.

The prodigal son had to make a decision to come back to his Father’s house and only then there was transformation.

If we don’t choose to come back to the Lord we will continue to be in the same pathetic position, but when we decide to walk back to Him only then will we get to the place where our lives and situations will be changed forever. True repentance will always be followed by the right actions. A person cannot say they have repented and continue to live a life of sin and defeat. When we turn back to the Lord, He will restore back to us all that we have lost. If we repent and believe and come to the Lord everything will change radically.

We read in **John 2:13-16**, *“The Jewish Passover was near, so Jesus went to Jerusalem. He found those who were selling cattle, sheep, and pigeons in the temple courtyard. He also found moneychangers sitting there. He told those who sold pigeons, “Pick up this stuff, and get it out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!”* (GW)

In the first passage in **Mark 11:17**, Jesus referred to the House of God becoming a den of thieves but in the above mentioned passage He warns against making the temple of God a market place of business transactions. An open place where anyone can come and do anything they want. It is also a place where people go to make money. It is indeed frightening, to even think of the response of Jesus to the various schemes, plans and sales that are being promoted in the Churches today.

Some people have hearts like a market place, where anyone can come and manipulate and deceive them. It represents a life without any rules or discipline.

John 2: 19, *"Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." (ESV)*

John 2:21, *"But the temple Jesus was speaking about was his body." (GNB)*

When Jesus said to the Jews, that if they could destroy the temple, He would raise it up in three days, they were perplexed. The reason for this confusion was they looked at the outward physical structure of the temple and knowing that it took 46 years to build it, they were unable to perceive what Jesus was saying. However, when Jesus spoke about the temple he was not referring to the architecture of the temple, but to His body that would be laid down for the sins of the people and raised up on the third day.

The Bible says that we are the temple of the living God. When the Lord looks at us, and searches our hearts, does He perceive that this is His temple where He resides and rules or does He see a dark place where thieves reside or a market place filled with chaos and confusion?

If our heart is like a Den of Thieves, we will be secretive and conceal our sins and secrets from others and live with a constant sense of guilt and shame. Our hearts would then be a dark place where the devil rules and enslaves. On the other hand if we allow our hearts to be a market place, we will allow others to wield us and lead us astray.

If we want to be freed from every form of bondage in our lives, we must surrender our bodies to become the temple of God, where the Lord will rule and reign. If that becomes a reality, there will be no place for the devil to have a foothold to enslave us to his evil schemes. The Lord will set us free from every form of oppression and bondage.

Our body is God's temple and if we destroy this body that the Lord has gifted to us so graciously, the Bible says, 'The Lord will destroy us'. If we were the owner of a house, we would take great precaution to not let anyone damage or destroy the house we own. How much more possessive will the Lord be, who has created us and given us this blessed body and life so He could dwell within.

Every single day we need to reiterate the fact that our body is the temple of God and if we live in total surrender and confess this fact, we will overcome and be victorious in every area of our lives. We should desire to make our bodies holy, a place where the Lord can come and reside and reign forever. Amen

Freedom from Captivity

Chapter 7

A Change of Mind

Matthew 3:1-2, *“In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 2“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (RSV)*

Matthew 4:17, *“From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (RSV)*

The central message of John the Baptist and Jesus as we can see from the above mentioned verses was on Repentance. The word ‘Repentance’ is essentially a ‘change of mind’. Since our thought life is secret and hidden from others many are negligent about keeping a check on the same, but repentance is the transformation that begins from within one’s mind. Repentance is rightly an alteration of our thought process. People can sometimes control our actions, but our thoughts are totally under our control and as our thoughts are hidden from others, we often don’t give much importance to controlling our thoughts. However, if our thoughts are not kept under control as they should be, they can cause many problems and complications for us.

The message of both Jesus and John the Baptist were echoing the same thing; if one wants to enter the Kingdom of God, then repentance is the prerequisite. The word Kingdom rightly implies, that there is a King who rules, and everything that happens there should be under His divine Lordship. The message is categorical; only when one brings the mind under control will one come under the Lordship of Christ and gain entry into the Kingdom of God.

Many are leading defeated lives because they have tried to change the outside but they have had no victory in their mind. If our mind is not renewed we will not see any real change.

In **Romans 12:2**, *“Do not conform yourselves to the standards of this world, but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind. Then you will be able to know the will of God---what is good and is pleasing to him and is perfect.” (GNB)*

If our mind is not changed there will be no change of life style. If the thoughts are new then the mind will be renewed, but if our thoughts are held captive by Satan there will evidently be no transformation of our lives.

What are the things that enslave the minds of people?

Wicked Thoughts

Proverbs 21:27 says, *“The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination: how much more, when he brings it with a wicked mind!”(WEB)*

Many are trying hard to cope with thoughts that are wicked and evil. They are unable to think anything good because the mind is filled with negative and vile thoughts.

Proud Thoughts

In **Daniel 5:20**, we read, *“But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was put down from the throne of his kingdom, and they took his glory from him.”* (LITV)

The above verse talks about King Nebuchadnezzar, whose heart was hardened with pride. Many are struggling with proud and lofty thoughts. A person with proud thoughts can easily be identified, as their talk will always be centered on themselves and their achievements. They will also constantly compare with others, to prove that they are far better than them. A proud mind is a clear sign that the Lord is not in command but the devil is, because humility is the Lord’s hallmark and pride is the trademark of the evil one.

Fearful Thoughts

In **John 20:19**, we read *“That Sunday evening, the disciples were together behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jews. Jesus stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you!”* (GW)

After the resurrection of Jesus, we see the disciples were hiding behind locked doors because their minds were filled with fear. Many are gripped with all sorts of fear and are living in a state of constant fear. These could be fears from the past, fears of the immediate or even fears regarding the future, but whatever it may be, many are unaware that fear is contagious. It surely affects the lives of those around us. In the list of those who will not find entry into the Kingdom of God, is mentioned those who are fearful and the reason for this is that, where there is fear there is no room for faith.

Doubtful Thoughts

Luke 12:29, says, *“And do not give overmuch thought to your food and drink, and let not your mind be full of doubts.”* (BBE)

The above mentioned verse clearly admonishes that our minds should not be filled with doubts. Some people doubt everything. A colleague shared an experience of working with a boss who was extremely suspicious and doubted everything. One day when the employee took a photocopy of a letter, and handed it over to the employer, he was shocked to see him study the photocopy intently to check if it was the same as the original. It might sound hilarious, but a lot of people live in constant doubt and suspicion. If Satan has his control over our mind, he will make everything and everyone look suspicious and will not let our mind trust anyone.

Thoughts that Blind

2 Corinthians 4:4 reads, *“Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe. They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News. They don't understand this message about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God.”* (NLT)

The above mentioned verse talks about a mind that is blinded by the god of this age. The reason Jesus came to the earth, was to give His life and bring us a wonderful salvation. He offers us victory by overcoming death and leaving His word and His Holy Spirit to guide and comfort us, but many people are blinded to this glorious good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Satan's plan is to blind our minds so we can never comprehend the beautiful message of the Gospel.

Only if we win the battle in our mind we will be able to see and experience victory in every area of our lives.

In **2 Corinthians 10:4** we read, *"The weapons of our warfare are not physical [weapons of flesh and blood]. Our weapons are divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses."*(AMP)

God has given us certain weapons to overcome the battle that rages in our mind. It is indeed true that Satan has built fortresses in our mind which we need to break down and destroy. In order for this to happen, we require God powered weapons. It will not be possible with our own human effort to break down these strongholds. Some people give a worldly advice that the best way to overcome evil thoughts is to keep it occupied, but that will only be a temporary solution.

How are the Strongholds Built?

In **2 Corinthians 10:5** we read, *"Casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ,"* (EMTV)

If we were to investigate how strongholds are built, the first step is when thoughts are instilled in our mind. The next step is that these thoughts stimulate our imagination which start to linger in our minds. These thoughts and imaginations when not brought under the Lord's authority will definitely become strongholds. It is so much easier for one to control the mind at the thought level, than to allow it to develop into imagination and let Satan build a stronghold in our mind, which then becomes a struggle to overcome. We must categorize our thoughts and not let self-pity, fear, doubt, failure and pride become the evil one's strongholds in our minds. Martin Luther said, "You cannot keep birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair." It's simple, we must learn to stop the thoughts at the very outset, rather than let them dawdle on and become tools that the enemy uses to enslave and keep us captive.

How do we overcome these Strongholds?

If we notice most of our struggles with our thought life is when we are alone. It is at those times we need to speak the word of God loud and clear. We should not give room for any negative thoughts. It is entirely in our hands. We must take the conscious effort to cast out every thought that is not pleasing to the Lord and bring our minds under the captivity of God and His word.

Instead of constantly telling ourselves what we are not supposed to think, we should train our minds to think those things that really edify and build our faith. That is why Paul gives this admonition to the Philippian Church in **Philippians 4:8**, *“In conclusion, my friends, fill your minds with those things that are good and that deserve praise: things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and honorable.”* (GNB)

It is important for us to analyse each of our thoughts and see they are as Paul exhorted in the above verse. It is paramount for us to deliberately break down and destroy every one of the strongholds that Satan has managed to build in our minds. May the Lord renew our minds to think and speak those words that build and edify us and others. May we fill our minds with those things that are good, that deserve praise, things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely and honourable.

Freedom from Captivity

Chapter 8

The New Covenant

In this Chapter we study the Bible further, to understand God's divine plan that He purposed in order to free us from every form of bondage and enslavement in our lives.

In **Exodus 2:23**, we read, *"Years passed, and the king of Egypt died. But the Israelites continued to groan under their burden of slavery. They cried out for help, and their cry rose up to God."* (NLT)

The people of Israel were in slavery and bondage to the Egyptians. Pharaoh, the King of Egypt, was not only a hard man, but one who ruled the people with an iron hand. Anyone who was captured by the Egyptians had almost no hope of escape from Pharaoh's cruel reign, as his heavy hand made them his bond servants. A person who was in bondage had to function like a machine with absolutely no will of their own. They had no direction, no way they could fulfil any of their desires and were subjected to a life of routine and drudgery. Pharaoh was using the people of Israel as slaves to build and establish his own Kingdom. The spirit of Pharaoh didn't care about the feelings or desires of those whom he had subjected. The people of Israel were in deep distress and as they struggled with their lives day in and day out, they called out to the Lord to have mercy on them and deliver them. The rule of Pharaoh was such that he gave the people of Israel no freedom or the time to seek God or worship Him.

For those of us who are so caught up in this rat race, where work and earnings becomes our top priority, so that we have no time for God, His word, prayer or fellowship with other believers, it's time we realized that we too are in bondage. If we continue this way, we will come to a stage in our lives when we will look back to realize and be saddened by the fact that we have only grown older but have not accomplished anything substantial in our lives. The people of Israel were crying out to the Lord so they could be brought out of their bondage, and be set free to worship the Lord once again.

If we sincerely seek the Lord to deliver us from our bondages, He will come to set us free. However, we must always keep in mind that the freedom and deliverance God brings us, is so we will worship the Lord and fulfil His purposes for our lives. Sometimes we are so overwhelmed with our cares, worries and difficulties that we hardly have time to seek after God. In the midst of our problems we must call on the Lord, and He will do things way beyond our thinking and understanding. There is absolutely no situation or problem that is too hard for the Lord to handle.

The cry of the people of Israel reached the ears of the Lord and He sends Moses to deliver them from the hands of Pharaoh. God's ways are strange and mysterious. Moses whom the Lord called to liberate the people of Israel, was raised in the very Palace of Pharaoh, the King of Egypt as his own son. Pharaoh did not realize that the child he was rearing in his Palace, would one day come back as a leader of Israel, to break the power of his iron hands and free the people of Israel. If Pharaoh had an inkling that this Moses would one day come

against him, he might have tried to kill him but the Lord had a purpose and protected Moses all through the time he was growing up in Pharaoh's Palace.

In **Exodus 7:16**, the Lord said to Moses, *"Say to him (Pharaoh), 'The LORD God of the Hebrews sent me to tell you, 'Let my people go to worship me in the desert.' So far you have not listened."* (GW)

When Moses went and requested Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go so they could worship the Lord in the desert, Pharaoh's retort was that they could very well worship their God right where they are. The Egyptians were an idolatrous people. They worshipped the Nile River and the Sun because they believed that they were two main sources of their sustenance. In a place where people worship the creation instead of the Creator the land gets defiled. Pharaoh was a hard man and would not agree to allow the people to be set free to go and worship the Lord. There was no way the people of Israel would have the freedom to worship the Lord in a place like Egypt.

We will study briefly from the history of the people of Israel and try to understand and correlate significance of what Jesus did to bring about freedom from our captivity. This will help us realize that, the solution for our problems does not come from man but only from the Lord Jesus. Whatever be our enslavement, it is the Lord alone who can free us from every form of bondage.

In **Exodus 12:3** we read, *"Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month, each man is to take a lamb for his family one lamb for the household."* (TLV)

In **Exodus 12:5** – *"a male, one year, unblemished"*

In **Exodus 12:6**, says, *"Then, on the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, the whole community of Israel will kill the animals."* (GNB)

In **Exodus 12:7-8**, we read, *"They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs."* (NRSVA)

The people of Israel were in a crisis, they were in gruesome slavery and the Lord was planning to deliver them from the cruel hands of the Egyptians. In order for the Lord to do this, the people of Israel had to listen and obey all that the Lord instructed them to do.

So also in our lives, if we seek to be freed from every bondage we must first and foremost choose to listen and obey all that the Lord commands us to do. For instance when we go to a Doctor for an ailment, if we want to recover, we must do exactly as the Physician instructs us or else our going to him or her would be pointless.

The command of the Lord to the people of Israel was to take a male lamb, a year old without any blemish to their house, on the tenth day of the first month. The lamb became a part of the family for four days and on the fourteenth day in the evening the lamb was to be killed. Their hearts must have been broken as they killed the lamb, but they did not question but obeyed because they were wanting their freedom from their life of slavery and

bondage. They were then to take some of the blood of the lamb and smear it on the two doorposts and lintels of their houses. That night they were to eat the meat roasted on the fire along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. The people of Israel did not understand why the Lord was instructing them to do all of this, but they only knew that the Lord had a solution to their slavery and all they had to do for their freedom was to simply obey His words.

When we go to the Lord with our problems and He gives His word of instruction, we must be willing to obey Him no matter what He says. When the Lord is giving us a solution to be freed from our bondages, we must give heed and not try to reason it out with our finite minds. Only then will we be set free from every enslavement.

The people of Israel obeyed and now were waiting to see what would happen. Before the night began there was the sound of the death of the lamb in the Israelite homes, but as the night proceeded this was replaced by the sound of death of the first born son in every Egyptian home. The protection of the blood of the lamb on the door posts and lintels was available to all, but only to those who accepted it and actualized it did the Lord give His divine grace and protection.

In **Exodus 12:23** we read *“For the LORD will pass through to strike down the Egyptians; when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over that door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you down.”*

Wherever the blood of the lamb was not smeared, the angel of death struck the firstborn in that house but the angel of death passed over all those who had the blood on their doorposts and lintels. Pharaoh and all of Egypt was so filled with fear and sorrow that they begged the people of Israel to leave. The Lord did not wage a war with the Egyptians to save his people from bondage and slavery, but all that He instructed them to do was slay a lamb. The blood of the lamb saved them from death and also freed them from the life of enslavement and captivity.

This was being commemorated by all the Jews, year after year, as the Passover Festival, to remember their great redemption from slavery. But the best was yet to come.

In **Luke 22:7-8** we read, *“The Day of Unleavened Bread came. This was the day when the Jews always killed the lambs for the Passover. Jesus said to Peter and John, “Go and prepare the Passover meal for us to eat.”* (ERV)

Jesus being a Jew Himself, asked His disciples to prepare to celebrate the Passover Feast.

In **Luke 22:19**, we read, *“And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.”* (EMTV)

In **Luke 22:20** we read, *“Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.”* (EMTV)

As Jesus broke the bread He was now giving it a new symbolism and telling His disciples, the bread represents **‘My Body’**. In the same way He explained to them that the cup they were

participating in was **'My Blood'** representing the New Covenant through His blood which was going to be shed for the sins of the world. This was now a new covenant the Lord Jesus was establishing with His disciples, which extends to all who believe in Lord Jesus.

All of us who live in this world are in bondage to sin, wickedness and to Satan and his schemes. None of us can come out and break free from any of these bondage with our own effort. But just like the lamb without blemish was slaughtered by the Israelites on the evening of the Passover, Jesus Christ the sinless Lamb was crucified for all of our sins, our curses, our sicknesses and our bondages. The reason Jesus died on the cross and shed His blood was so that, we too may pass from death unto eternal life.

That is the reason why we celebrate communion in Church. The bread is the representation of the body of Christ and the cup is the representation of the blood of Christ that was shed on the cross.

In **1 Corinthians 5:7** reads, *"Take away, then, the old leaven, so that you may be a new mass, even as you are without leaven. For Christ has been put to death as our Passover."* (BBE)

Paul refers to Jesus Christ as the Passover Lamb who was slain on our behalf and it is indeed His death that brought us victory. If we are covered with the blood of the Lord Jesus, Satan will have no power over us. We must believe and accept this fact that Jesus died on the cross for each one of us and when we make this personal decision to follow Jesus, He comes to break every bondage and frees us from everything that enslaves us. It's only when the Lord lives and reigns inside of us that we can defeat Satan.

As the Israelites fled from Egypt towards their freedom the Egyptian army pursued them and tried to overcome them but God made the very sea that parted and brought deliverance to the Israelites, a death trap for the entire Egyptian army. In **1 Corinthians 10:2** Paul refers to the Israelites passing through the Red Sea as an imagery of a person who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, repents and is passed through the waters of baptism. It is important therefore that for one to come into this New Covenant with the Lord Jesus that they not only believe and accept Him as their King and Master but must also be baptized.

Baptism is that act of faith whereby we identify with what Jesus did for us on the cross. Just as Jesus died and rose again so we too confess by being baptized, that we are dead to our old self and rise again to a new life and that just like Jesus rose again we too will rise again in the last day. That is why Jesus said, 'unless a man is born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter the Kingdom of heaven.'

Regardless of the kind of bondage we are in, we must sincerely desire to be set free so we can truly worship and serve the Lord. As we worship and praise the Lord, He breaks all those things that bind us. Paul and Silas were thrown in prison, but they praised the Lord in spite of all their chains, and the result was all their chains and fetters fell apart and they were freed. As we continue to walk in obedience to the Lord and worship Him, the Lord will set us free from everything that enslaves us and we be transformed to be those who fulfil the purposes of God in our lives.

Freedom from Captivity

Chapter 9

Accountability

In **Genesis 2:18** it says, *"Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to live alone. I will make a suitable companion to help him."* (GNT)

God in His divine plan knew that it was not good for man to be alone. When God created the universe and everything in it, the Bible records how 'God saw that all of it was good'. However, when God created Adam, God said, 'It is not good for man to live alone' and that's why He created Eve as a suitable companion for her. However, in today's society many are opting to be single or unmarried and choose to lead solitary lives.

When a person decides to be single, no matter how good the notion may be, it first and foremost goes against God's plan for mankind. It is therefore apparent then that a person who chooses to be alone, is more likely to fall into a bondage and trap that Satan sets up for them. A person who chooses loneliness, gives room for his mind and thoughts to be captured by the evil one. We looked in detail in the previous chapter how our thoughts can lead to imaginations, and then end up being strongholds that Satan can control and enslave. If one can avoid this loneliness, and learn instead to be accountable to someone, we can certainly protect ourselves from becoming targets of Satan and his strongholds.

In **Proverbs 18:1**, we read, *"One who isolates himself pursues selfish desires; he rebels against all sound judgment."*(HCSB)

The one who does not incorporate himself with others but chooses a life of alienation, is usually as the verse explains someone who only pursues his own selfish desires. Such people are also mostly rebellious and do not wish to heed any advice from anyone, and will get irritated when anyone suggests anything. A selfish and self-centred person will want to have their own way in everything and will not be willing to live in co-operation with others. Often the fault may lie with us, but instead of setting things in order in our own lives, we find it easier to find fault and blame others for all our problems.

In days gone by we used to communicate with each other by writing letters. It used to take a lot of time and effort to do this, but people went to great lengths to write and communicate only because they valued relationships. Now, we have smart phones and internet which should technically have advanced our communication with each other, but sadly this is not the case. Our communications with others have dwindled down to minimal words and emoji's. Many of us have become islands and prefer this isolated and lonely way of functioning.

A father went to his daughter-in-law's parents with this complaint. He said, 'I imagined that when you said your daughter never looked up, that she was shy, but now I know what you mean. It is indeed true that when she starts looking down at and gets hooked up on to her phone, she sure never looks up at anyone.' This may sound funny, but the fact of the matter is the virtual world is not a real world, and we must decide and make a conscious effort to

communicate with those real people who live right next to us. Instead of Parents handing over smart phones and tabs to children to keep them occupied, must make it a point to speak and listen and communicate with them in a meaningful way. It is only in relating with others does one learn to be accountable. This is absolutely impossible in virtual relationships.

Some of us fast for a day in a week, so we can discipline ourselves, forfeit a meal so we can spend time meaningfully with God. It is a good idea from time to time to take a fast from our phones too. Instead we can spend time meaningfully with our families and with other people. This will surely prove to be beneficial to us in building meaningful relationships.

We must seek good godly companions to whom we can be accountable to. For a married couple their spouse should always be their best friend and spiritual mentor. Husbands and wives should motivate one another and also learn be accountable for each other's spiritual growth. Those who are not married should find a good friend to whom they can be accountable to.

In **2 Corinthians 2:12-13**, *“When I went to the city of Troas, the Lord gave me an opportunity to spread the Good News about Christ. But I didn't have any peace of mind, because I couldn't find Titus, our brother, there. So I said goodbye to the people in Troas and went to the province of Macedonia.”* (GW)

Paul was going to Troas with the intention to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. When he got there and discovered that Titus was not there, he decided to leave to move on to Macedonia. Paul was an Apostle of Jesus Christ, but he was dependent on Titus a fellow brother because he not only knew the importance of being accountable to a fellow believer, but understood the strength that one derives from it.

It's important for us to find someone to whom we are accountable to, to whom we give the right to question us and help us grown in our walk with the Lord. Husbands and wives should also take responsibility for each other. Being accountable not only edifies and strengthens us, but also is a good protection from falling into Satan's trap. We must also encourage our children to be accountable, especially in matters pertaining to the Lord and His word.

2 Corinthians 7:5-6, Paul says, *“Even after we arrived in Macedonia, we did not have any rest. There were troubles everywhere, quarrels with others, fears in our hearts. But God, who encourages the downhearted, encouraged us with the coming of Titus.”* (GNB)

Paul moved on to Macedonia and there also he was faced with untold difficulties and fears. However, he recalls how he received encouragement when his fellow brother Titus came to him.

In **Ecclesiastes 4:9** we read, *“Two are better off than one, because together they can work more effectively.”* (GNB)

If we have godly friends and companions we can be sure that we will not only be stronger, but we can definitely achieve a lot more together. Each of us have our own problems and issues, but when we have a person who can stand with us in those hard times, we will find it far easier to face the challenges, as we have someone who can pray for us and support us through all of it.

We read about an incident in **2 Samuel 10:9-12**,*"Joab saw that the enemy troops would attack him in front and from the rear, so he chose the best of Israel's soldiers and put them in position facing the Syrians. He placed the rest of his troops under the command of his brother Abishai, who put them in position facing the Ammonites. Joab said to him, "If you see that the Syrians are defeating me, come and help me, and if the Ammonites are defeating you, I will go and help you. Be strong and courageous! Let's fight hard for our people and for the cities of our God. And may the LORD's will be done!"* (GNB)

The people of Israel were in battle with the Syrians in front of them and the Ammonites behind them. This is what Joab the commander of the Israel army and his brother Abishai plan and strategize as they face this attack. Their arrangement was that if the Syrians whom Joab and his troops were facing were more powerful, then Abishai and his troops would rush in to help them and if it was vice versa then Joab and his troops would come in to stand by Abishai.

It's always good to have someone who can stand with us and to whom we can be accountable to. Accountability to another person keep us humble, there is more strength and boldness and certainly no room for fear.

When Joab and Abishai were willing to do what God wanted them to do, they had the assurance and boldness to fight the battle because they knew that the Lord would do the rest for them. They encouraged each other to be strong and not fear the mighty troops that they were going to face, but to fight for the people and the cities of their God.

It is important for us to do all that the Lord requires of us to do. Many people have a faulty understanding that it is enough to just pray and do nothing on their part. For instance, if a farmer who wanted to see his fields flourish, decided to only pray and not go out to work in his fields, we can be sure that he will have nothing but thorns and thistles growing in his field. It's only when we do our best that the Lord will do the rest. The same is applicable to handling of our finances and to every other area of our lives. God expects us to be responsible and accountable in every aspect of our lives; our personal life, with our families, at work and at church too.

The early church grew in leaps and bounds because they gathered together to pray, to break bread and fellowship. It's a great blessing for families to come together to pray for one another and for our communities. It's also important that we keep the focus of our gatherings in mind and not lose out on the purpose of the same. As we pray together the Lord will bring work mightily and bring about a great revival all around us. Praying together is a sure way for us to be accountable to each other.

In **Genesis 3:1**, we read, *“Now the snake was the most cunning animal that the LORD God had made. The snake asked the woman, “Did God really tell you not to eat fruit from any tree in the garden?”(GNB)*

We are not sure if Eve was alone at the time of being tempted by the Serpent. It is indeed a great probability that she and Adam were not together at the time of the temptation for if they were, Eve may not have fallen so easily into Satan’s trap.

As being accountable is a great blessing to us, let’s choose to practice being accountable in every area of our lives. As husbands and wives we must be accountable to each other, to assist and build each other up in our spiritual walk and growth in the Lord. Let’s motivate one another to read the word and pray more. So also those who are single, find a godly fellow believer to whom you can be accountable. It’s only when we continue in fellowship with others and practice being accountable to one another, can we overcome Satan and be set free from every form of bondage and enslavement.

Freedom from Captivity

Chapter 10

Throne of Grace

We read in **Hebrews 4:14**, *“Let us, then, hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we have a great High Priest who has gone into the very presence of God...Jesus, the Son of God.”* (GNB)

We live in a world where it is so easy for us to be ensnared and in bondage to various sinful habits. Outwardly we may appear to be living a carefree life, but the truth of the matter is that, deep down we know that we are in enslavement to the passions and desires of this world. The Lord’s promise to us is that, irrespective of the kind of things that we are entangled with, He is able to deliver us out of them all, and set us free from every kind of bondage. Knowingly or unknowingly we have become slaves to many things in this world. Bondages don’t happen in a day, it is a slow and deliberate process. Some people have relinquished their faith in God and backslidden because of these enslavements.

In **Hebrews 4:14** we are exhorted to *“hold firmly to the faith we profess.”* For instance if we are travelling on a bus with a bag of rice and the bus ticket in our hand, it is obvious that we will be more careful with the ticket than with the bag of rice. If we lose our bag of rice we can always buy it back for the same price, but if we lose the ticket we may have to pay a fine ten times more than the ticket itself. So also in life, we often find ourselves holding on tightly to worldly things and lose out on the more important spiritual things, not realizing that we disinherit a lot when we do so. When we don’t focus on our relationship with God and on matters pertaining to Him, we will find that our prayer time, Bible reading, fellowship with other believer’s starts to dwindle and so does our faith in God. Since our faith is the fundamental element that overcomes the world, we are being admonished to ‘hold firmly to our faith.’

How do we hold on to our Faith?

The Great High Priest

In **Hebrews 4:14** we read that, *“Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession....”* (RSV)

In the Old Testament we read about the role and functions of a **‘High Priest’**. The duty of the High Priest was to enter the ‘Most Holy Place’ once a year to offer sacrifices for the sins of the People. The presence of God is ‘Most Holy’ and so the High Priest who entered the ‘Holy of Holies’ did so with reverential fear and always with the offering of a lamb that was to be sacrificed and it’s blood shed for the sins of the people.

Jesus became the **‘Great High Priest’** who took on Himself the sins of the world by shedding His blood on the cross for each one of us. Since Jesus is the ‘Great High Priest’, He is now at the right hand of the Father in heaven, interceding on our behalf. We are the beneficiaries of Jesus’ constant intercession on our behalf. No other person can intercede to the Father on our behalf. Jesus is the only one who can do that, because He alone has gone up to the

Heavens and is beholding the face of the Father. All other High Priests who lived earlier died but Jesus was the only 'Great High Priest' who rose from the dead and lives on into eternity. No matter how many times we sin and go back to God for forgiveness, it is the Lord who is constantly interceding for us to be set free from all our sins and bondages.

The only mediator between God and man

We read in **1 Timothy 2:5**, *"For there is one God, and there is one who brings God and human beings together, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself to redeem the whole human race."* (GNB)

There is only one God and the only person who is the intercessor between God and man is Jesus Christ. At the beginning of creation we see the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit at work when God says 'Let us make man in our own image' **Genesis 1:26**. Jesus was there, before the creation of the world, but the only reason He came down to the earth was to take on a human form, live a sinless life and give His life as a ransom for the sins of the world. There was no one else who could live that sinless life.

When the Angel Gabriel brought the news of the birth of Jesus to Mary, we see how Mary magnifies the Lord. In **Luke 1:46** we read, *"And Mary said, My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,"* (ESV) It was obvious then that Mary being a human being herself, also needed a Saviour as much as anyone else did.

The sinless High Priest

In **Hebrew 4:15** we read, *"Our High Priest is not one who cannot feel sympathy for our weaknesses. On the contrary, we have a High Priest who was tempted in every way that we are, but did not sin."* (GNB)

Jesus is also the Great High Priest, because He alone was sinless. All other High Priests who lived before Jesus, were all sinners and so it was imperative that they take along with them a lamb to slaughter first for their own sins and also for the sins of the people. Jesus on the other hand being a sinless High priest was able to enter the most holy place with His own blood.

We may wonder how Jesus could have been tempted in every way just like us. All temptations we face can be broadly classified under these three main categories.

1 John 2:16 we read, *"The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life."* (Webster)

In **Luke 4:13** we read, *"When the Devil finished tempting Jesus in every way, he left him for a while."* (GNT)

It is obvious from the above mentioned verse, that Jesus underwent temptations several times all throughout His life here on earth, and it was not just the three that are recorded in

Luke chapter 4. It clearly mentions in **Luke 4:13** that the Devil only left him for a while, so Jesus too was tempted many other times too.

All of us may go through these seasons of temptations. At certain times we face so many struggles and then we will have a period of peace. When we go through these stages of severe temptations, we must recognize that Satan is at work and draw closer to God so we can escape all his evil plans.

Jesus is the only Great High Priest, because He alone went through all the temptations and overcame every one of them and was able to live a sinless life. Therefore, He is the only one who can help us in our times of weakness and temptations. If we run to Him, He will give us the strength to resist and overcome every temptation.

For example, if we were looking for coaching in IAS, and we had two options, one centre run by a person who failed the exam and the other run by one who cleared all the exams, it is obvious that we would choose the one who succeeded. So also, the only one who can help us overcome every temptation, is the Lord Jesus who Himself overcame every single temptation while He was here on earth. As long as we live on this earth, we will be subject to all kinds of temptations, because Satan is constantly on the prowl, seeking whom he can devour. Every time we face temptations we run to the one who is the overcomer of all temptations and we seek His help with much prayers. The more the temptations, the more we pray.

As we grow in the Lord we will find that we will face a lot more struggles and temptations. But, we have the assurance that the Lord is with us and the Bible says that a man who overcomes temptation is a blessed man. If one wants to measure the strength of the wind, one needs to go against it. When we are confronted by temptations we must confess that the Lord who is in us is far greater than the one who is in the world and we will definitely not succumb to temptations. We must read the word, hear the word and confess the word by faith. The word of God is full of promises that we need to personalize and confess daily in our lives so that we will grow in our faith.

In **Hebrew 4:16**, we read, *“Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”* (Webster)

There are three parts of the verse that we will look at: **The Throne of Grace, Grace and Mercy.**

It is only when we do something against God and His word that we feel guilty. When Adam and Eve were in relationship with God they could freely come and commune with God but when they disobeyed and ate the forbidden fruit, they hid from God because of the sense of guilt and fear that overcame them. Whenever we sin, and Satan accuses us we should not fear and go away from God, but rather boldly approach the ‘Throne of Grace’ because the Lord is willing to forgive and pick us up every time we fall. We have a Great High Priest who is interceding for us and He is willing to lift us up every time we fall.

The question is *‘What can we obtain at the Throne of Grace?’* The answer is grace and mercy. If we were to define mercy and grace we could say it this way. Mercy is God not

punishing us as our sins deserve, and Grace is God blessing us despite the fact that we do not deserve it. Mercy is deliverance from judgment. Grace is extending kindness to the unworthy.”

Mercy is the Lord being kind and compassionate to us and not punishing us and sending us to hell as we deserve but redeeming our lives. God’s Grace is the unmerited favour of God that qualifies us to go to heaven. God’s grace give us forgiveness and makes us His children.

A toddler who is learning to walk, may fall many times but we encourage the child to walk, but as the child grows older things change and we don’t expect the same behaviour. So also a young believer may struggle to overcome temptation and may fall many times, but as we grow in the Lord we must be aware of all the darts of the evil one, and must overcome temptation and be victorious.

David did a great sin in taking Bathsheba and killing Uriah but the Lord calls him ‘a man after His own heart’. It was not because David never sinned, but because he confessed his sins and the Lord in His grace and mercy forgave him. No one can say we are without sin. But we can come with boldness and ask the Lord to forgive us and help us to be victorious because the Lord is interceding for us.

We have a Great High Priest who is at the Father’s right hand interceding for us. He is the Great High Priest who overcame all temptations and was the perfect sacrifice. Therefore, we can approach the Throne of Grace boldly. Every area of our life that we are in bondage to, could be the lust of our flesh, the lust of the eyes or the pride of life, if we can confess our sins and come to the Lord with a repentant heart, He is willing to give us the victory over every bondage in our lives. He will transform us to be overcomers.

Let me close with the definition of mercy and grace that I love so much – Because of God’s mercy I am kept from going to hell – But because of the grace of God, I am qualified to get into heaven. Don’t lose heart; the bondage breaker is our Great High Priest and we can always run to His ‘Throne of Grace’ and receive both mercy and grace!

Freedom from Captivity

Chapter 11

Are You Trying to Hide or Run?

We read in **2 Corinthians 5:18**, *“All this is done by God, who through Christ changed us from enemies into his friends and gave us the task of making others his friends also.”* (GNT)

Have we considered all the marvellous things God has done for us through Jesus Christ, and His work on the cross? While we were in sin, living in opposition and enmity with God, Jesus changed our status to become friends with God. God accomplished this by taking the first step in seeking after fallen man, and redeeming us through the precious blood of His only begotten Son, Jesus. All this was completed by God Himself, only because of His immense love for each one of us.

We might have noticed that when two people are at enmity with each other, there will always be a contention between them, as to who will take the first step to give up their ego and make peace with the other. This is something very common in families too, especially between spouses. Even when there is a small misunderstanding between husband and wife, each one waits for the other to take the first step to set things right. Sometimes when both wait for too long the distance and animosity grows, and a simple disagreement which could have been easily sorted out and settled, sometimes becomes the cause for a permanent separation.

So also when man sinned, he became an enemy of God. When we read **Genesis 3:9** which goes like this, *“But the LORD God called out to the man, “Where are you?”* (GNB), we will realize that it was God who came searching after man, when man sinned against Him. It was God who took the first step towards reconciliation and peace, because He is a God of love and grace.

How did this enmity begin?

In **Genesis 2:15-17**, we read, *“Then the LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and guard it. He told him, “You may eat the fruit of any tree in the garden, except the tree that gives knowledge of what is good and what is bad. You must not eat the fruit of that tree; if you do, you will die the same day.”* (GNB)

God gave man the freedom to eat from every fruit that was there in the spectacular Garden of Eden. It must have been a really vast and delightful garden that Adam and Eve were placed in, because the nature of God is such that He is always bountiful and abounding in all He does. The only prohibition God set for them, was not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Isn't it a sad thought that when Adam and Eve had a really huge garden full of fruits to enjoy, that they chose to desire the only fruit that was forbidden them in the entire garden.

Many have this thought that God could have chosen not to place the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden, and thereby denied Adam and Eve the access and choice of eating the fruit of that tree.

Here's the reason why God kept the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden, and gave man the instruction not to eat from it. Of all the things God created, man was the crown of God's creation because He was made in the image and likeness of God. God has a free will, and he bequeathed this gift of a free will to man, since man was made in His image. If God told man he could eat all that was there in the Garden of Eden, and left him with no other option, man would not have had a chance to exercise the free will that God had bestowed on him. By forbidding man to eat fruit from the one tree in the garden, God placed into man's hands the freedom to analyse and choose what was good and right for him. That is what makes man different from all other animals. Animals function entirely on the basis of their instinct, but man has the capacity to think, reason and then make an appropriate choice. For this to materialize, God had to give man the freedom to choose to eat or not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Have you noticed how human beings are delighted when given an option to choose something? Children like it when they have multiple choice questions, men and women go through great lengths in choosing their life partners, and huge malls are preferred over smaller ones only because there is a wider variety of brands to choose from.

We read in **Genesis 3:6**, *"The woman saw how beautiful the tree was and how good its fruit would be to eat, and she thought how wonderful it would be to become wise. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, and he also ate it."* (GNB)

Eve saw things that God did not intend or plan for her to see, and the result was that she ate the forbidden fruit and also gave it to her husband. Often we get ourselves into problems when we disobey God, and desire those things that he has prohibited us to have, which are for our own good. The most sorrowful event in the history of mankind, was that man instead of enjoying all that was freely given to him, chose to go after the one thing that was forbidden to him.

God has given us so much good to choose from, and the sombre fact is that man's nature is such that he goes after what is detrimental to him, rather than what is helpful to him.

What happened as a result of their disobedience?

In **Genesis 3:8** we read, *"That evening they heard the LORD God walking in the garden, and they hid from Him among the trees."* (GNB)

Adam and Eve did two things when they disobeyed God. Firstly, they avoided the presence of God because of guilt, and the secondly they hid themselves from the presence of God.

Who taught Adam and Eve to hide?

When God created man, he also placed in him a conscience that distinguished man from all other created beings. The conscience of man speaks to him when he sins against God. We

say our conscience was pricked, when we feel that sense of guilt because God has placed it within each one of us. Even without being taught, a person is able to discern good and bad only because of the conscience that God has placed within us. It was Adam and Eve's guilty conscience that prompted them to hide from God and His presence.

Many people are unable to come and enjoy the presence of God because they have sinned and are living with a guilty conscience.

God cannot tolerate sin, and so the sin that Adam and Eve committed created an enmity between the holy God and sinful man. When the only available option for them was to hide, but in **Genesis 3:9**, we read, *"But the LORD God called out to the man, "Where are you?"* (GNB). As Adam and Eve hid from God, it was God who came searching after them. When God asked them, *'Where are you?'* it was not that He did not know where they were hiding, but God was asking them, *'Where are you in your relationship with Me?'* because when Adam and Eve sinned, they fell out of friendship and the intimate relationship that they enjoyed with God.

When all that man could do was hide because of sin, God in his love, mercy and grace came searching after man. We can never play hide and seek with God. God will always win, so all we need to get back to Him and seek to have our friendship and fellowship restored with God. Many of us may have had a close and deep relationship with God, but over time we may have fallen out on this relationship and now our lamps are burning dimly. God is still calling out to us and waiting with open arms, and if we come back to Him, He will surely trim our lamps and make them burn brighter than before.

When Elijah hid from God

In **1 Kings 19:9**, we read, *"There he went into a cave to spend the night. Suddenly the LORD spoke to him, "Elijah, what are you doing here?"* (GNB)

Elijah was in a place that God did not intend for him to be and that is when God asked him, *'What are you doing here?'*

Let's do a quick study on the background to this incident. Israel was filled with Idolatry. Jezebel who was the Queen, had raised up many prophets for the god Baal and the land was completely defiled. Elijah, the prophet of God, challenged the 450 prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel to offer a sacrifice which their god Baal was to attest by fire. The whole day they cried out to Baal, and nothing happened. At the end of the day Elijah the only representative for the Lord, placed his sacrifice before the Lord, which the Lord God consumed the sacrifice entirely by raining down fire from heaven. When God gave Elijah the great victory, Elijah put to death all the prophets of Baal. When the news of the slaughter of the prophets of Baal reached Jezebel, she was enraged and decided to put Elijah to death. When Elijah heard this threat, he was so terrified that he ran and decided to hide from Jezebel.

In **1 Kings 19:5-8**, we read, *"Then he lay down and slept under the broom plant. An angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." When he looked, he saw near his head some bread baked on hot stones and a jar of water. So he ate, drank, and went to sleep again. The angel*

of the LORD came back and woke him up again. The angel said, "Get up and eat, or your journey will be too much for you." He got up, ate, and drank. Strengthened by that food, he travelled for 40 days and nights until he came to Horeb, the mountain of God." (GW)

The first place of rest for Elijah was under a broom tree. God sent an angel who woke him up and placed some bread and water to refresh Elijah. The prophet was so discouraged, he didn't even recognize the angel. He went back to sleep and the second time the Angel of God woke him up again and encouraged him to eat and told him that he had a long journey ahead of him. Elijah ate the food and travelled for forty days before he reached Horeb, the Mountain of God. God was so loving and gracious, that instead of stopping the prophet from running, he strengthened him with food so he could continue to run.

Some of us may also be running away from God, but God is still gracious and ready to meet us right where we are, and provide for all our needs. The question is 'are we running with faith or running in despair?' When faced with a challenge, let us decide to run towards God and not away from Him. The comforting thought for all of us is that, in whatever circumstance we are in, God is an amazing God who is ready to intervene, strengthen us and win us over to His side.

It was at Horeb that the Lord encounters the prophet Elijah who was hiding in a cave and asked him, '*What are you doing here?*' He was encouraging the prophet to get out of his hiding place and to get to the place that God has planned for him to be in.

We can never hide or run from God

The Psalmist says in **Psalms 139:7**, "*Where could I go to escape from you? Where could I get away from your presence?*" (GNB)

In **Psalms 139: 8-10**, "*If I go up to heaven, you are there. If I make my bed in hell, you are there. If I climb upward on the rays of the morning sun or land on the most distant shore of the sea where the sun sets, even there your hand would guide me and your right hand would hold on to me.*" (GW)

We can never outrun God or hide from His presence. No matter where we go be it to the highest heavens, or the depths of hell or as far away as we can imagine, the Psalmist declared that His hand is able to hold and guide us. God knows everything about us; He knows when we lie down, wake up, every word, thought, all the difficult situations we face.

We may have made wrong decisions and chosen to walk away from being in fellowship with God. However, if we are willing to come back, He is able to change and transform everything. God yearns for us to return to Him and make Him our first love. We must make a decision to come back and be reconciled to God. It is only when we are at peace with God, can we be at peace with others and this will permeate into all other relationships. That's why Jesus said blessed are the peace makers. Even if you have gone astray, you can decide to get back and be reconciled to the Lord, for He alone has broken the wall of enmity and can renew our friendship and fellowship with God. May we never try to hide or run away from the Lord, but instead always run into His presence, which is the only place of perfect peace and safety.

Freedom from Captivity

Chapter 12

Conscience

Let us look again at **Genesis 3:9**, *“But the LORD God called out to the man, “Where are you?”* (GNB)

Our God is omniscient, the one who is all knowing, which implies that He knows everything about the past, present and future. God is also the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end who originates and culminates everything. Why then would an all knowing God come seeking after Adam and ask him, *“Where are you?”*

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, they knew at that very moment that they had lost the right and privilege to stand before a holy and Almighty God. They realized this, because of the voice of conscience that God had placed inside of them, which spoke loud and clear, convicting them of disobedience and sin against God.

Whenever we are tempted to do wrong or have done wrong, we too can hear this voice inside of us, telling us that we are going amiss or have erred and are therefore going down a wrong path. That distinct voice inside each of us, is our conscience. Our conscience is a God given gift, which is like an arbiter who is constantly evaluating all that we do, and instructing us as to what is right and what is wrong. Our conscience can also be compared to an umpire in a game of cricket, who is watching intently and makes a judgement when the batsman or bowler make a mistake.

For instance when we gossip about someone, our conscience prompts us to stop, but sometimes we choose to override that voice, and after we have gossiped our conscience becomes even more active, reminding us that we have defamed someone else. Sometimes, others may even justify what we have said and done, but our conscience will always let us know when we have done wrong. Our conscience is a good indicator God has given us, which resides within us all the time. Often times when our conscience is bothering us about something, we will find ourselves looking to others for support, so we could try to justify what we said or did.

An example from David’s encounter with King Saul

In **1 Samuel 24:2**, we read, *“Saul took three thousand of the best soldiers in Israel and went looking for David and his men east of Wild Goat Rocks.”* (GNB)

Saul is insecure and fearful that David would soon take his place as King of Israel. So, he goes hunting for David with three thousand of his best soldiers. David had done nothing amiss to King Saul. It was obvious to everyone that God was with David and hence they began to follow David. This made King Saul furious and jealous, that he sought desperately to kill David. To escape King Saul and his soldiers who were stalking them, David and his

men hid themselves in a cave. It so happened, that King Saul and his men came into the same cave, where David and his men were hiding.

When David's men saw this, here's what they said to him, In **1 Samuel 24:4**, *"This is your chance! The LORD has told you that he would put your enemy in your power and you could do to him whatever you wanted to."* (GNB)

For many people, if they got a chance to get even with someone who hurt them or wronged them, they would never let an opportunity slip by without taking revenge. We could rightly call them opportunists.

David's men were inciting him to make the best use of this favourable chance to take revenge on King Saul. Not only were they instigating him to finish off King Saul, but they were using the Lord's word and His name to reinforce their point to David. They were indeed right in explaining one part of the above mentioned verse that the Lord did tell David that he would subdue his enemies under him, but they forgot the other part that the Lord gave David the freedom to do to his enemies whatever he thought was fitting.

It is important that God's word should be divided correctly and understood rightly or else we too could be easily misled. We must always read and appropriate the word of God accurately, as it was meant to be understood. It is a dangerous thing to take the word of God and apply it out of context or without its entirety.

This was a test from God to see what David would do in a situation that seemed favourable to him. The Lord tested David in three areas to check if David would heed the voice of God through his conscience or give in to the pressure of the men who accompanied him.

Will David be grateful?

Firstly, David had the men and the power to put to death King Saul, but I am sure that David recalled that it was King Saul who believed in David, and gave him permission to fight and defeat Goliath. It was only because King Saul gave David the opportunity to represent all of Israel, that the Lord enabled David to win a mighty victory, which made David so famous among the people of Israel. David was a grateful young man, who decided that he could not kill the King who trusted him, and was willing to take the risk to let him fight a mighty giant.

Each one of us must often look back and recount the numerous blessings God has bestowed on us. As children, instead of questioning our parents, we must with thankfulness realize how much they sacrificed to raise us up, and bring us to where we are right now. It is often good to remember all those people who in some way contributed to our life and helped us along the way.

Will David trust God to take revenge?

Secondly, when faced with the option to take revenge and get even with King Saul, David chose to wait on the Lord and let Him do the needful, instead of taking the situation into his hands, and getting even with King Saul.

Often we are waiting for the appropriate time to even the score with those who have harmed us or hurt us, but the Lord clearly says, *"I will take revenge, I will pay back says the Lord"* **Romans 12:19** (GNB). We must be willing to submit all the evil that has been done to us by others into God's hands, and wait patiently, for only then will He accord justice at the right time.

Will David respect God's anointing on King Saul?

Thirdly, it was a test to see if David would respect God's anointing on King Saul. It was God and not David who anointed Saul as King. David realized that King Saul was God's choice, and honoured this greatly. He therefore resolved that he would absolutely do no harm to King Saul.

It is indeed unfortunate that people have meme's of even those who are in ministry serving the Lord. It is good to keep in mind that it is the Lord who calls someone into ministry, He anoints and uses that person. By mocking these anointed men and women of God, we must realize that we are slighting God who called them and anointed them in the first place.

When the men continued to prod David, he went near King Saul and in **1 Samuel 24:4**, we read *....."David crept over and cut off a piece of Saul's robe without Saul's knowing it."* (GNB)

After David had done this we read in, **1 Samuel 24:5**, *"But then David's conscience began bothering him because he had cut Saul's robe."* (NLT)

When the men who were with David pressured him to go, he slipped in and cut off a piece of Saul's robe and we see what happened to David. The moment he did that, David's conscience started bothering him. His conscience that remained silent until he did wrong, now began to bother him a great deal. When David obeyed God and his conscience and apart from cutting off a piece of his robe did no harm to King Saul, when it was in his hands to do so, we see that God was greatly pleased with David.

Let's read the wonderful testimony of God about David as recorded in the book of Acts. We read in **Acts 13:22**, *"But God removed Saul and replaced him with David, a man about whom God said, 'I have found David son of Jesse, a man after My own heart. He will do everything I want him to do.'"* (NLT)

Both King Saul and David had a conscience, but Saul invalidated his conscience when he went after David seeking to kill him. David on the other hand was very conscious of God's voice and the conscience that God had placed inside of him and refrained from harming King Saul in any way. God honoured David for his faithfulness and not only replaced David as King in Saul's place, but also testified of David that *'he was a man after God's own heart'*.

When David took a census in Israel

In **2 Samuel 24:10** we read, *"But after he had taken the census, David's conscience began to bother him. And he said to the LORD, "I have sinned greatly by taking this census. Please forgive my guilt, LORD, for doing this foolish thing."*(NLT)

When King David decided to take a census of all the tribes of Israel, took pride in the number of people in the land and the strength that was in his hands, after the count was completed, he knew that he had done wrong, and sinned against God. David had himself mentioned in **Psalms 118:8**, *“It is better to trust in the LORD than to depend on people.”* (GNB) David’s conscience was pricked when he sinned, which prompted him to turn to the Lord. He earnestly longed for God’s forgiveness and restoration. Here again we see how David was so sensitive to the voice of his conscience that God had placed inside of him, that he repented and confessed his sin to the Lord, and sought His pardon.

When we too are tested in various ways, it is essential that we be sensitive and tune in to the voice of God, through our conscience. We may recall times when we deliberately disobeyed the voice of our conscience and did things that totally displeased God. The secret to a healthy conscience is to turn to the Lord immediately, whenever our conscience convicts us of sin or any kind of wrong doing.

We read in **1 John 1:9** that, *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* (NKJV)

We also read in **Proverbs 28:13**, *“Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy.”* (NIV)

Instead of falling into sin and getting trapped by Satan, let us choose to heed the voice of our conscience, turn to the Lord and confess our sins to Him. The Lord alone can rid us of a guilty conscience and help us to be at peace with our conscience. Let us evaluate ourselves to check if we have a healthy conscience. Our conscience is given by God for internal judgement, we can even call it our internal audit. Let’s ask God to grant us a pure conscience, so we are in right relationship and fellowship with Him.

Freedom from Captivity

Chapter 13

Train Your Conscience

In **Romans 2:15** we read, *“They know what is right and wrong, for their conscience validates this “law” in their heart”* (TPT)

Conscience is that inner voice that God has placed within each one of us, for internal judgement. Our conscience is what cautions us, even before we do something wrong, it bothers us when we are doing the wrong thing, and convicts us even after the deed is done. Those who work in an office set up will understand the whole process of internal and external audits that are conducted once or twice a year. The purpose of the internal audits is to assess if the income and expense of the department was spent right, so that there will be no issues raised when it’s time for the external audit. The Bible also talks about a day of reckoning, when all of us will have to stand before God, who will judge us. That final judgement day can be equated to the external audit and our conscience to the internal audit. If we develop a healthy conscience by obeying the voice of God daily, we can stand without fear before God, on that final judgement day.

How David’s conscience got weakened

We looked at 2 incidents from David’s life in the previous chapter.

In **1 Samuel 24:5**, we read, *“But then David's conscience began bothering him because he had cut Saul's robe.”* (NLT)

We read in **2 Samuel 24:10**, *“But after he had taken the census, David's conscience began to bother him. And he said to the LORD, “I have sinned greatly by taking this census. Please forgive my guilt, LORD, for doing this foolish thing.”* (NLT)

The first incident is one where David cut off a part of King Saul’s robe, and immediately he was filled with deep sense of grief and remorse for doing so, because his conscience started to bother him. The second event was when David decided to take a census to count the number of people in his kingdom, which again greatly troubled David’s conscience because instead of trusting in the Lord who had been his strength, gradually David started to depend on the number of people under his rule and the strength of his armies.

Here is an important lesson for us to learn from the life of David, that regardless of how much we may rise in our position or status, our trust and dependence must be on God alone. Our trust and confidence must never move to our abilities, talents, wealth or position, because God alone is our security and our sure foundation.

David defeats the Syrians

In **2 Samuel 10:18** we read, *“And the Israelites drove the Syrian army back. David and his men killed seven hundred Syrian chariot drivers and forty thousand cavalry, and they wounded Shobach, the enemy commander, who died on the battlefield.”* (GNB)

When David, the man of war, went to war with the Syrians, he had with him a great army, the most efficient commanders and he went with them personally to war. God granted the Israelites an astounding victory over the Syrians.

When David’s feet strayed away from God

In the very next chapter we read, **2 Samuel 11:1**, *“The following spring, at the time of the year when kings usually go to war, David sent out Joab with his officers and the Israelite army; they defeated the Ammonites and besieged the city of Rabbah. But David himself stayed in Jerusalem.”*(GNB)

The next year however, when the army of Israel went to war, in a season when David as King of Israel should have gone to war, he abdicated his responsibilities to his commander Joab and decided to stay back in his palace in Jerusalem.

2 Samuel 11:2, *“One day, late in the afternoon, David got up from his nap and went to the palace roof. As he walked around up there, he saw a woman taking a bath in her house. She was very beautiful.”* (GNB)

It started off when David who should have been fighting along with his army, took a casual walk on his terrace, after a nap. In his moment of idleness, David’s eyes moved away from the Lord who bestowed on him his throne and all that he possessed. He looked on with lust at a woman who was bathing, saw that she was beautiful and desiring to have her, called for her to be brought to his palace and committed adultery with her. The beautiful woman was Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, an ardent soldier in David’s army.

Not only did David commit adultery, but once he knew that Bathsheba got pregnant he quickly conspired to cover his tracks. He called her husband Uriah back from battle, and forced him to go to Bathsheba, so it would appear that the child was not his but Uriah’s. When Uriah being an upright man and a faithful soldier refused to do so, David intoxicated him with drink and sent him back to Bathsheba. Nothing could deter Uriah from his resolve to stay patriotic to King David and the men who were fighting on Israel’s behalf. Though Uriah was only a subject of King David, he knew exactly where he ought to be and nothing could avert him from his firm position. While David’s feet strayed from the right path, Uriah’s was firmly set and in the rightful place.

David as King of Israel, was under the influence of other contemporary Kings of his time. Many of them had no qualms to misuse their positions of authority, and took for themselves whichever woman they desired or lusted after. When things got out of hand, David realized that he could not hide and cover his adultery. He therefore schemed with the commander of his army, got Uriah to stand in the front of the battle lines and got him killed.

David who was earlier bothered by the small act of cutting off a piece of robe of King Saul, had so silenced the voice of his conscience that none of what he did with Bathsheba or to Uriah bothered him anymore.

It was only when the word of God came directly through the prophet Nathan to David, who confronted him of his sin and wickedness, did David's conscience awaken that he accepted his faults and repented most sincerely before the Lord. Psalm 51 is the repentant outcry of David as he earnestly desired the Lord's pardon and deliverance from his sinful ways. God had mercy on David, pardoned him and restored him back to Himself.

Other examples of those who walked away from God's path

God chose Moses to be a leader of Israel, but for many years Moses walked away and was content looking after his father-in-law's sheep. He forgot God's calling for his life until God met him in the wilderness and reminded him to go back to Egypt to be the deliverer for the people of Israel who were in bondage to Pharaoh.

God called Jonah to go and preach to Nineveh, but he ran away and went towards Tarshish. By his disobedience, he put the entire crew who were on the ship in deep distress. It is a word of admonition to us that even when one member of the family does wrong and chooses the wrong path, the entire family has to endure the consequences of it.

Samson was called and anointed by God. He was a strong man, a warrior, called by God to deliver the people of Israel, but he made many wrong choices and finally ended up on Delilah's lap. By being in the wrong place, unsurmountable trouble and hardships came right to his doorstep.

Elijah was a mighty prophet of God, but he was found hiding in a cave. Instead of being bold and challenging Ahab and Jezebel, he ran away and hid himself.

All of the above mentioned people, are mentioned to remind us that no one is exempt from the temptation to walk away from the will of God. It is imperative that we seek God the way we should, and do everything according to His will alone, and only then will our feet be firmly set in God's ways. We must always learn to introspect and appropriate God's word to ourselves first, and not direct it towards others. We should not put ourselves in a place of idolatry, witchcraft, astrology or anything that does not please God. When we stand in a place where we are not supposed to be in, we will certainly forfeit all of God's blessings in our lives.

Lessons we must learn

We live in times when it's becoming more and more difficult to live in obedience to God and His word. Every single day our newspapers and media are filled with the sombre news of murders, rape, scams, scandals etc., and as we read and listen to these regularly our minds get so tuned to the world that like David, we too begin to accept as a norm, all those things that God rejects, thereby dulling our conscience and the voice of God inside of us.

For instance, there was a time when homosexual relationships were looked at with disgust but grievously in today's society not only has it become an acceptable practice, but the tragedy is that even some churches approve of these relationships and are even willing to conduct same sex marriages. The word of God has been replaced by worldly ideologies, and so the world is now dictating to people what is right and what is not.

As parents if we don't teach the word of God to our children, we can be sure that they will never learn to choose between right and wrong and will stay confused. Only as we stand firm on the word of God, can we take a stand, and make the right decisions when faced with contradictory choices. If our conscience needs to be healthy and sensitive, we must read the word of God daily and obey the voice of God. The word of God alone can teach and guide us to live the righteous life, make godly decisions and keep our feet from choosing the wrong and destructive paths.

All of us must pray and seek God's strength in our daily lives. We must guard our eyes for if we don't, like David, our feet too will end up in the wrong place. As no one is exempt from falling prey to the lust of the flesh, our eyes must be holy and our hearts turned to the word of God to stay and live aright. We must be zealous to live godly and holy lives every single day.

Many of the problems we encounter are because our feet don't stay where they are supposed to. If we are not in the right place where the Lord wants us to be, we will be in big trouble. We must decide to stay firm in the place where the Lord wants us to be. The path that God takes us through may be difficult, may have struggles but the Lord will stand with us and fight our battles for us and give us victory. However, if we are in the wrong place, we will most assuredly face defeat.

If we desire to have a healthy conscience there is only way. We must decide to spend much time with the word of God and do it daily. It's only when our conscience is sensitized by the word of God and the Holy Spirit of God that we will be constantly guarded from making wrong and sinful decisions. If for some reason we do make mistakes and fail, only a healthy conscience that is rooted in God's word will bring us back into fellowship and restore our relationship with God.

We read in **Psalm 119:105**, *"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."*(KJV)

It is only the word of God that can light up our life and illumine the path in which we should go. It is God and His Word alone that can keep our lives free from sin, keep our conscience alert and sensitive to the prompting of the Holy Spirit and help us live uncompromised and victorious lives.

Freedom from Captivity

Chapter 14

Shape Your Conscience

As each one of us strive to live a life free from every form of enslavement to all kinds of sinful habits, one of the best gift's the Lord has bestowed on us, to help us experience true freedom from every form of bondage, is our conscience.

In **Romans 2:15** we read, *"They know what is right and wrong, for their conscience validates this "law" in their heart."* (TPT)

The conscience that God has instilled in man is not only in believers but in every human being, so that every person is fully aware of what is right and wrong, irrespective of who they are. Conscience that God placed inside of us, is that voice that cautions us before we decide to do wrong, convicts us while we do wrong and constantly bothers us after we have done wrong.

Like most companies have internal and external audits our conscience is the internal audit that the Lord has placed inside of us to keep our lives in check and in order, as each one of us will one day have to stand before the judgement seat of Christ to face what we may call the external audit. As the judgement of the Lord is an assured reality, where each of us will have to give an account for every sinful thought, word and deed, it is necessary for us to keep our consciences alert and sensitive to the voice of God, so we need have no fear to stand before the Lord on that day.

Many people today, are faced with perpetual conflict as to what is right and what is wrong. What was considered inappropriate in days gone by, is now treated as acceptable and the norm. The world sets certain standards which society also attests to, but sadly these standards are flimsy and constantly subject to change. For example, a decade ago if boys wore torn jeans which it today branded as 'beggar jeans' they would be pitied, but today it is considered fashionable and trendy.

As the standards of this world keeps altering continually every day, we as believers are called to exercise caution, to not into the trap of getting ourselves entangled by the world and its ideologies. In order to be strong and live by God's standards, we must realize that our conscience is that voice of God that we must constantly give heed to. If we start to compromise on various issues, we will find that we gradually begin to blend in with the world, weaken the voice of our conscience and will certainly come to a place where we no longer feel any form of remorse over things that are not really pleasing to the Lord. Without our even realizing it, our conscience is daily being shaped by the standards that we adhere to.

It is good to remind ourselves that God's standards will never change, but will always remain constant. Talking about the law of the Lord, David says in **Psalms 19:11**, *"They are a warning to your servant, a great reward to for those who obey them."* (NLT)

The word of God not only warns us, but also promises great reward to those who live in obedience to the same. The word of God therefore is our only standard to follow and live by, for we believe and worship a God who is the same yesterday, today and forever.

In **1 Timothy 2:9**, Paul says, *“I also want the women to be modest and sensible about their clothes and to dress properly;”* (GNB)

Paul in the above mentioned verse admonishes women to dress modestly. This standard that God has set in His word does not change with time. Our modernity should never compromise the modesty that the Lord expects for us to have. This is true for and applies to every other area of our lives. In an age where we are being forced to compromise and fit in with the crowd, it's a good reminder that the Lord has set certain standards for us, and we will be blessed if we comply with His guidelines. Let us not lower our standards to the standards of this world, as the standards of this world are always in conflict with God's holy standards.

For example the world dictates that if one were to lie to escape a complicated situation it is acceptable. The world has also categorized lies conveniently as white lies and black lies. There's a story told of four young boys who bunked classes and missed their exams to go for a fun trip. When they got back the next day, all four of them gave letters saying that they couldn't make it to the exam as the tyre of the car they were travelling in got punctured. The teacher who was a shrewd man, made the four young men sit in different rooms and told them that he would give them a re-exam. The boys were shocked when they found only one question on their paper and the question was 'which tyre got punctured?' and all of them got stumped. The story may sound hilarious, but often we put ourselves in a situation of deceit and compromise thereby landing ourselves in deep trouble.

It is becoming more and more difficult for us to live in obedience to the Lord, as society dictates that everything should be accommodated, so that many things considered wrong earlier are no longer frowned upon. It is only when our conscience is shaped and moulded by the word of God, can we live differently and comply to Gods divine standards.

A little boy was taking his report card to his Dad and even before his father could look at the marks, he informed his father that 20 boys in his class got zero in the same subject. The father opened the report card eagerly to see what his son has scored, only to find that he had just obtained four marks. Though he along with the 20 other boys had failed, the boy appeased himself with the thought that he secured 4 marks instead of zero like his classmates did.

Many of us are like that little boy, content to compare ourselves with others and satisfied with the thought that we are far better than most of them. Our standard for living should never be other people, but only the word of God. A good name cannot be obtained overnight, as we grow in our faith and choose to walk in obedience to the word of God we will be faced with conflicts. However, as we overcome these contentions and choose to live by God's standard every time and shun the standards of this world, we will get to the place that the Lord desires us to be.

The difference between the 'word' and the 'world' is just in the letter 'l' but in reality it makes a huge difference for one to be a follower of the word and not of the world.

One of the reasons the Pharisees hated Jesus was because their standards were always in conflict with those of Jesus. We will face situations where we are in a dilemma whether to live by God's standards or the worldly standards, but if we choose to follow the voice of our conscience and live as the Lord desires and make no compromise, we are assured of a place in the Kingdom of God. The reason Jesus had to go to the cross was because He chose to not accommodate Himself to the standards of this world, but rather chose to live His life in obedience to the will of His father in heaven.

The parable of the Pharisee and Tax Collector

In **Luke 18:11-12** we read, *"The Pharisee stood up and prayed, 'God, I thank you that I'm not like other people! I'm not a robber or a dishonest person. I haven't committed adultery. I'm not even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my entire income.'"*

Jesus told this parable of two men who came to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a Tax Collector. We see how the Pharisee was constantly comparing himself with the Tax Collector and in doing so, he not only justified himself but also felt far more righteous than the Tax Collector. The boasting of the Pharisee was based entirely on his regularity in fasting and in his tithing. However as the Lord looked at both of them, He was most indignant with the Pharisee as the Lord saw through his hypocrisy and legalism which surely did not justify him before God. On the other hand the Lord found the Tax Collector's prayer more acceptable, as it came from a sincere and repentant heart.

Many believers are of wrong notion that if they pray, fast and give their tithes regularly the Lord is pleased. This is a faulty understanding of who God is, and what He expects from us. Ever so often Jesus was angry with the so called religious leaders of His time rather than with the gentiles who did not really know who He was.

In **Matthew 23:27-28**, Jesus said, *"How terrible for you, teachers of the Law and Pharisees! You hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look fine on the outside but are full of bones and decaying corpses on the inside. In the same way, on the outside you appear good to everybody, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and sins."*(GNB)

We see how Jesus was indignant with the teachers of the law and the Pharisees for one reason and that was their hypocrisy. Outwardly they looked like whitewashed tombs, beautifully white and polished on the outside, but if one were to dig a little deeper they were full of decay and stench.

This is the double standard of living that the Lord does not approve. Only when our conscience is shaped according to the word of God and not conformed to the standards of this world, can we as believers lead a consistent life. By compromising with the standards of the world to suit our circumstances, we have lost our credibility and are unable to be the witnesses that the Lord expects us to be. We are called to be truthful and constant in every

single area of our lives and in whatever place we may be; at home, at church, at work, at school or college and wherever else we may be. It is only when we are upright in everything, will we receive the Lord's blessings in all we do. The world is satisfied if one looks good on the outside, but the Lord does not look and judge as man does. God does not look at the outside but searches deep into our hearts, and expects purity and holiness from within.

Let this be our prayer to be the same without and within. Let us keep our conscience sensitive and not allow it to become hardened. Once we give room for the world to start shaping our conscience, we will become weak and inconsistent in our walk with the Lord. On the other hand if the word of God shapes our conscience, we will have consistency in our walk, in our life and our future will be glorious and blessed, and everyone will recognize that we are sons and daughters of the Most High God. Only as we live consistent Christian lives others will come flocking into the Kingdom of God.

Jesus was the supreme example of one who lived His entire life here on earth, in total submission to the Father's standards. If we follow the standards of this world, we will do everything right on the outside, but our inner motives will all be erroneous. So also, if we chose to follow and live by the standard of the word of God, sometimes our actions may seem wrong but the inmost motives of our hearts will be in sync with what God expects of us. May the Lord enable us to shape our conscience purely in accordance with His word.

Freedom from Captivity

Chapter 15

Shape your conscience – Part 2

In the past few chapters, we have delved deep into the subject of our conscience. To summarize briefly, we understand that our conscience is placed inside of us by God Himself, it is God's gift to us, which serves as our internal audit to help us be aware of what is right and wrong. Our conscience we learnt enables us keep our life in order and in accordance with God's word, so we can stand without fault before God's judgment seat, which can be referred to as the external audit. We recognized that this conscience is instilled inside all human beings, both believers and non-believers alike. Conscience is also something uniquely gifted only to humans, and not to other animals. For instance an animal which kills another animal or even a man feels no sense of remorse.

We looked further at how the standards of this world are in conflict with God's standards, and therefore we must constantly shape our conscience to be aligned with God's word, as the standards of this world is altering according to the whims and fancies of people. If we allow the world's standards to shape our conscience, we will begin to lead sinful lives that will not please God in any way.

God's standard versus the world's standard

In **Matthew 5: 27-28** we read, *"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery. But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.'*" (NKJV)

The above mentioned verses, which are Jesus' teachings on adultery refers to two standards. The one which is accepted by the world, as is also mentioned in the Law of Moses is *'you shall not commit adultery'*. However in Matthew 5:28, Jesus however taught another standard which is far higher than what the law demands. According to this standard set by the Lord, if a man looks at a woman lustfully, he has already committed the act of adultery with her in his heart.

The Lord warns us that our eyes should be trained to be pure. Many are struggling with the sins of the eyes, because while there is much restriction as to what one can do with their hands and legs, there is no restraint set as to what one can do with their eyes. We will be shocked to know that many of our sins originate from the eyes, but often people justify themselves that the sins they commit with their eyes, like pornography for example affect no one but themselves. Many youth are so addicted to the lust of the eyes, that they are struggling and unable to free themselves from these bondages. The standards of this world is dictating to people, that it is acceptable to be hooked on to obscenity, and the conscience inside of them has been quietened by the voice of the world.

We read in **Matthew 6:22**, *"The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light."*(NKJV)

The eye, Jesus said is the lamp of the body, and that is why what we fill our eyes with, determines what our life is filled with. Only when our eyes behold the good things can our life be filled with light. Everyone irrespective of how old or young they are, man or woman must certainly exercise caution in this area.

In the book of Job we read about Job, a man who had everything and lost it all, his wealth, his family and his health because the Lord chose to allow him to be tested. When the friends of Job joined together in judgement and accused him of wrong doing as the cause for his predicament, this is what Job replied to prove his innocence before the Lord, in **Job 31:1**, *"I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?"*(KJV)

Job had made a covenant with his eyes to not sin against the Lord with his eyes, and so he was very certain that none of the calamities on his life were a consequence of sin in his life.

Some of us use our eyes so extensively to watch movies, serials and memes on cell phones, and often justify ourselves that this is just harmless entertainment. What happens over a period of time, is that our minds get filled with all the values and standards that are portrayed through the various forms of media. There was a time when people would shy away from looking at anything obscene, but today there are loads of uncensored images that are readily available on our phones and many adults, youth and children too have become enslaved to these indecencies.

In **Matthew 6:33** Jesus said again, *"But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!"*

The Lord cautions us further that if our eyes are tuned to seeing things that are bad, the light within us will be replaced by darkness and that darkness will be very great. If we don't make a covenant with our eyes to look only on those things approved by the standards set by God and His word, we will not enter into the Kingdom of God. Jesus clearly warned us that the gate and way to eternal life is narrow and only a few will enter it. We must discipline ourselves to be those who keep walking in that narrow path that the Lord has set before us.

In days gone by, adultery was unaccepted, homosexuality was shunned and looked at with disgust by society, but today it has become an acceptable lifestyle to many, including those in the church. If we as those who believe in Jesus don't take precaution and shape our conscience and teach our children to live by the standards of God's word, soon a day will come when our children will go astray, and will chose to go the ways of the world.

As parents we must be good examples, and make sure we are watching things that are useful and edifying to us and our children. Lot and his family are an example of how children can deviate from God's law and standards. As long as Lot was with Abraham, he was in safety, but when he parted from Abraham we find that Lot moved towards Sodom, pitched his tent outside at first, moved into Sodom and later became an elder there. After Lot's wife died, his daughters did the thing that was detestable in the eyes of the Lord. The reason for this was that their eyes while living in Sodom, was filled with the evil that they beheld all around them, which deviated them from the ways of God.

Every little detail we feed our eyes with are like tiny seeds that are being planted inside of us. If we are constantly viewing the immoral, indecent and obscene, they will over a period of time get accumulated inside of us, and we will end up doing those things we never thought we were capable of doing.

We too like Job must make a covenant with our eyes to only look on those things that please the Lord. In the Old Testament, one of the first things that many kings did when they captured a foe, was to gouge out his eyes. The reason for this gruesome act was that they knew that more than 70% of a man's strength lies in his eyes. Samson was a strong and mighty warrior, anointed and chosen by God to be a deliverer for God's people, but when Samson chose to let his eyes wander and lust after many women, he ended up in captivity to the Philistines. The first thing that the Philistines did when they captured Samson, was to gouge out his eyes so as to incapacitate him.

The woman caught in adultery

In **John 8:3** we read, *"Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst,"* (NKJV)

Here was a situation where the scribes and Pharisees caught a woman in adultery and brought her to Jesus for judgement. Adultery as we looked at earlier begins with the eyes, and here was a woman who let her eyes go astray, and was now stood condemned.

In **John 8:4-5** we read, *"they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?"* (NKJV)

The ones who brought this woman to Jesus were the religious leaders, who were not only well versed with the scriptures, but whose conscience was shaped by the Law of Moses, which made them feel so self-righteous, that it was almost impossible for them to identify their own sins and shortcomings. They were so caught up with the faults of others that they failed to see the major flaws in their own lives.

Many people are so busy finding fault with everyone around them that they have no time to stop and check their own lives to see where they have failed before God.

The punishment to stone and kill a person may sound so harsh to us, but the reason the Lord dispensed such a crude punishment was because He is a covenant keeping God. Marriage is a covenant, and the Lord expects us to honour the covenant we made to our spouse. God is also zealous about the covenant He has made with each one of us as His children. The blood that Jesus Christ shed on the cross of Calvary He said, is the blood of the new covenant poured out for our redemption and salvation. That is why when we break our covenant to be holy before the Lord, the Lord is deeply grieved because it amounts to being an act of betrayal. The Lord called Israel His son, but when the people of Israel made a golden calf and bowed down to it, the Lord was angered, and punished them only because they broke their covenant with Him.

As the leaders continued to bother Jesus to pass judgement on the woman here's what Jesus said in **John 8:7**, "*So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first."* (NKJV)

John 8:9, "*Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.*" (NKJV)

These religious leaders who could not see any of their own faults were now in a spot as Jesus answered them this way '*he who is without sin, let him throw the stone at her first*'. Suddenly they were all struck in their conscience, as all of their sins loomed large before them, some probably far greater than what the woman had committed. The only difference was that she was caught, while most of them had managed to cover up their sins. No wonder then that all of them walked away from the eldest to the youngest, leaving the woman standing alone before Jesus, for they were smitten in their conscience by the words of Jesus directed to them.

Here's a word of caution to those who have the habit of constantly finding fault with others, what could happen in the process is that we can become blinded to our own sins and failings. It is only when we concede the word of God to shape our conscience, that we can keep our conscience alive and sensitive to the promptings of God and His Holy Spirit. It is only in heeding to the voice of our conscience constantly, will we become so perceptive to the minutest mistakes in our lives and will be able to set our lives in order. The conscience always convicts us, but if we silence the voice of our conscience deliberately, we will soon find that our conscience will not bother us anymore, which can be a dangerous place to be in.

A little child may get caught when doing wrong only because he or she does not know how to cover up their mistakes, but the older we get the better we become at hiding our mistakes. The reason why the older ones left first was probably because they realized the many grave sins that they had committed.

In **John 8: 10-11**, we read, "*When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord."* And Jesus said to her, "*Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.*" (NKJV)

Our God is a God of great love. He was going to the cross for the sins of this woman also, and that is why He out of His great love and mercy pardoned and set her free.

When man sinned and disobeyed God at the Garden of Eden man lost much, but thank God that He still kept the conscience inside of us. The question we need to ask ourselves every day is whether our conscience is shaped by God's word or by the standards of this world? The word of God and the standards of God are consistent and will never change. Let us spend time with the word and allow our conscience to be shaped by the standard of the word. Our eyes are God's gift to us so we can behold Him.

That is why Jesus said in **Matthew 5:8**, “*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*” (NKJV) which implies that for one to see God the heart must be pure, and for the heart to be pure the eyes must look on those things that are pure. Only a heart that’s pure can truly behold God in all His splendour and holiness.

Freedom from Captivity

Chapter 16

The Reason We Submit to Authority

In **Romans 13:5** we read, *“We must obey therefore, not only in order to escape punishment, but also for conscience' sake.”* (WNT)

All of us are familiar with the principle that if we don't obey rules and submit to those in authority, we will get punished, and this convention is manifested in various spheres of our lives. For example, parents in order to get their children to study, often admonish them with various consequences, schools punish children for late coming by imposing fines on them, employers threaten employees at work place with pay cuts for unexcused leave or absence from work, relations are often compelled into participating in family functions fearing being ostracized by them in future and so also many people comply to the rule of wearing helmets only because of the apprehension of being caught by the cops. By and large we have become a society, who conform to rules and accede to authority only because we fear punishment for non-compliance.

For instance, a father advises his son to wear a helmet while driving his motorbike. The youth argues with his Dad that this won't be necessary, as he has the money to pay the fine if caught. He also justifies his behaviour further with the reasoning that, even if he were to be caught, he would pay the fine once and then he could go around the whole day with the receipt in his pocket and have no fear of being taken again. Here is an example of a young man who is wilfully breaking a rule, willing to pay the fine and chooses to operate against his conscience.

When this kind of behaviour is translated to our relationship with God, we choose to obey Him only because we are gripped with fear and dread of retribution by God, not realizing that our God a loving God, and we are totally safe only when we submit to His Lordship and authority.

Obedience that originates from this kind of fear of penalty is not true obedience. That is the reason why the apostle Paul exhorts us in **Romans 13:5**, that our obedience must stem from our conscience and not because we fear the consequences of disobedience. Our conscience is that inner voice and testimony from within our own heart, and is something that cannot be stilled or manipulated. We might be able to deceive people with our behaviour and talk, but we can never defraud our own conscience.

It is in the context of submitting to every kind of authority placed over us, Paul admonished believers to live by the directive of their conscience. The primary reason we are required to submit to authority, is that all authority has been ordained by God Himself. When we disrespect authority, we are dishonouring the Lord who established the same.

If the only reason we obey authority is fear of retribution, we will scheme and look for ways to evade every possible rule. Many people look at people in authority as their adversaries, rather than those appointed by God for their good.

In **Romans 13:1** we read, *“Everyone must submit to governing authorities. For all authority comes from God, and those in positions of authority have been placed there by God.”* (NLT)

Authority starts at home, the Lord has placed the wife under the authority of her husband, children are under the authority of their parents and this extends to our schools, our work place, in society and in every single area of our daily lives. Authority is something we will never be able to evade. Even a person in business may be functioning independently, but he too is accountable to the government and is obligated to follow certain rules and regulations set by them. Every form of authority comes from God alone, but many people consider authority as a burden, and therefore choose to disrespect any form of authority.

Let us look at the various relationships where God has established this authority.

Parent – children relationship

At home, parents exercise authority over their children and constantly instruct them entirely for their good, but often children may not perceive it as such. The parable of the prodigal son in **Luke 15: 11-20**, is a valuable example, where the younger boy rebelled against the authority of his father, and chose to go on his own. He demanded his share of property, which should have rightfully come to him only after his father’s death. As the young man had no respect for his father, he confiscated his share from his Dad while he was still alive, which the father being a kind man relinquished to him. The younger son we read in **Luke 15:13**, stayed on for a few more days with his family, probably pretended to be a good chap and then took off with everything that belonged to him, moved to a distant land and spent all that he had in riotous living.

In **Luke 15:16** we read, *“The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything.”* (NLT)

After having wasted all of his father’s wealth, the younger son was now, famished and in a deplorable state where even the pods that pigs ate seemed good enough to satisfy his intense hunger. The reason for the arduous situation the young man was in, was because he did not respect the love and authority of his father, but chose to walk away in disobedience and rebellion.

Many children rebel and walk out of their homes without realizing that the authority that is exercised over them by their parents, is only for their welfare and in no way for their detriment. As parents if we don’t use the authority God has entrusted to us and discipline our children whenever necessary, we are in a way abdicating the responsibility that God has committed to us. Our disciplining our children is for their good, and it will ensure that their future is great. We must teach our children to respect everyone, and this respect must firstly be modelled at home. If we tolerate disrespect from our children at home, we can be sure they will never respect others outside. Children must be taught that though discipline seems hard at the present time, it is for their benefit so that they have a blessed life ahead of them. It is also important for us to remember that every decision and action of ours will have consequences which will be faced by no one but ourselves.

Teacher – student or disciple relationship

Many children are in fear of their teachers and dissent any form of authority in their schools. They are unwilling to accept any kind of discipline from their teachers. When teachers reprimand children, many parents blindly support their children and question the school authorities. Instead we should teach our children to respect the authority of the teachers who are placed over them, to enable them to grow up to be respectable young men and women.

In that encounter when Jesus first called Peter to follow him, we recall how Jesus was preaching from Peter's boat. As soon as he finished, he asked Peter to go a little deeper and throw his nets for a catch. Peter was a seasoned fisherman, who after a whole night's work had returned to the shore having caught nothing. However, because of his respect for Jesus he said to Him in **Luke 5:5**, "*Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net.*" (NKJV) Peter could have thought, Jesus was a carpenter by profession, what would He know about fishing, but instead Peter readily submitted himself to the authority of Jesus and the result was mind blowing. They had such a great catch of fish that their nets were breaking and their boats sinking. But when Peter realized who Jesus was and the call to become a '*fisher of men*' he submitted himself to the Lordship of Jesus, left everything and followed after Him.

The same Peter after having spent three and a half years with Jesus, after His death, burial and resurrection, decided to go back fishing and took along with him six other disciples. When Peter decided to move away from being submissive to the Lord, he found himself again in a similar situation he had been in, when Jesus first called him. He toiled all night and caught nothing. He stood again with his nets empty, and his labour unproductive. Peter's life was blessed only as long as he was submissive to the authority of the Lord.

There will be fruitfulness in our lives only as long as we submit to authority. All our efforts will be meaningless and void, if we are not submissive to every authority that the Lord has placed over us.

Master – servant relationship

We read about the story of the Syrian commander Naaman in **2 Kings Chapter 5**, who came to the prophet Elisha to be cured of his leprosy. When Elisha commanded Naaman to go and dip himself in the river Jordan, Naaman had to submit to the authority of the prophet and do as he was told to experience that miraculous healing. He came back and offered generous gifts to Elisha as a token of appreciation and thankfulness, but Elisha refused to accept anything from Naaman.

Elisha's servant Gehazi was completely of a different mind. He had a rebellious spirit that stopped him from submitting to the authority of the prophet. He ran after Naaman, coveted some of the gifts, left it at his home and went back to the prophet Elisha. Elisha knew what Gehazi did, as a result, the leprosy that left Naaman was contracted by Gehazi and his family forever. That was the gruesome consequence Gehazi had to face, for not submitting to the authority of the man of God whom God had established over him.

We too must learn to submit to authority not only for fear of punishment or just to appease those who are over us, but because every authority had been set up by God Himself.

Many people are of the view that as we living in a period of grace and it is perfectly fine to live any way we like. There is a warning for us from the life of the early church. When the believers in the early church genuinely sold and gave all of their property to the apostles, there was a couple named Ananias and Sapphira who also wanted to make a show and pretend to give their all just like everyone else. They sold their fields and withheld a portion of it deliberately, and laid the rest at the apostle's feet. What happened as a result of that deception was that both of them lost their lives.

Anything we do, must be done sincerely and with the only motive as unto the Lord and not to please men. When we rebel against authority, we must be cautioned that instead of receiving blessings, we will only receive curses as did Ananias and Sapphira.

Irrespective of whether we are at home with the family, at school, at our work place, in society or at church let us decide to be subject to every authority placed over us, for it has been set up for our good, and has been more importantly established by God.

If we were to think about it, any rule that is imposed on us like, to wear a helmet or seat belt have all been implemented only for our good and safety. Laws are not enforced for the benefit of policeman, neither are lawmakers killjoys, but rather those who are placed over us have been placed in position of authority, just to enhance our safety and well-being. We will be a lot happier if we follow the rules and will surely avoid loads of dangers.

Our life will be filled with joy if we learn to submit to all authority that is placed over us. There are lots of rules and regulations that are imposed on us which are really meant for our good and to bring order in our lives. We must truly be thankful to God for every authority that He has placed over us; our husband, wife, parents, teachers, employers, government and pastor.

The greatest blessing we all have is our conscience within us. We must decide to submit to all authority not fearing punishment or consequence, but only because of conscience sake. We must constantly tune ourselves to listen to the voice of our conscience and live in obedience to it. By doing so our lives will be peaceful, blessed and joyful.

We looked at 3 examples, the prodigal son whose conscience must have bothered him when he left home, but his wilful disobedience landed him in a place of filth and want with pigs. Peter decided to go back to fishing against his conscience, and ended up in a place of failure and emptiness. Gehazi ran against his conscience and coveted gifts from Naaman, and the consequence was he lost the anointing that would have been his, and contracted the leprosy of Naaman. Let us remind ourselves from **Romans 13:5**, "*We must obey therefore, not only in order to escape punishment, but also for conscience' sake.*" (WNT) and learn to live every day in obedience to the voice of our conscience and in submission to every authority the Lord has established over us.

Freedom from Captivity

Chapter 17

When Emotions Stifle Our Conscience

*In **Genesis 42:21**, we read, “Then they said to one another, “In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged we and we did not listen. That is why this distress has come upon us.” (ESV)*

These are the words of the brothers of Joseph as they stood before him, unaware that the Governor of Egypt before whom they stood, was their own brother Joseph whom they mercilessly threw in a pit, and later sold as a slave to some merchants. They attributed the predicament they were in, to the hardness of their hearts when they ignored their brother Joseph’s plea, when he begged them in his distress and pleaded with them to have mercy on him.

When jealousy overpowers our conscience

*In **Genesis 42:9-12**, we read, “And Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of them, and said unto them, Ye are spies; to see the nakedness of the land ye are come. And they said unto him, Nay, my lord, but to buy food are thy servants come. We are all one man’s sons; we are true men, thy servants are no spies.”(WBT)*

For a background to this story, Joseph was sold by his brothers as a slave, but the Lord intervened and raised Joseph to become a ruler, next in command to Pharaoh, King of Egypt. The severe famine in Israel had forced the brothers of Joseph to go to Egypt to buy food for their families. The Lord was with Joseph and has raised him up to be the Governor in Egypt, but his brothers were unable to recognize him. When Joseph accused them of being spies, who had come to survey the land of Egypt, the brothers of Joseph felt compelled to give Joseph a background to their family. They mentioned that they were twelve sons of the same father, and that one of the son’s was lost, and the youngest was back home with their Dad.

When Joseph refused to believe their explanation, his brothers begged him to have pity on them, but he turned a deaf ear and threw them in prison for three days. Joseph later released them on the condition that they bring back their younger brother, when they come back for more food. As Joseph’s brothers stood before Joseph with fear and dread of what would happen to them, they recalled a similar situation many years ago, when they had ruthlessly sold their brother Joseph into slavery, and had completely ignored his cries for mercy. They perceived that the reason for their predicament was because of what they connived and did most heartlessly to their brother, not giving heed to his intense cries for help. Even though their conscience bothered them as they sold their brother, the brothers of Joseph were so overwhelmed with the feelings of jealousy, that their conscience got dulled in the process. Their jealousy was so extreme that they stilled the voice of their conscience, and sold their own brother for money, as a slave to strangers.

The reasons Joseph's brothers were jealous of him was that their father favoured him. Joseph was also a young man of integrity, who would not tolerate any indiscipline from his elder brothers and would report them to his father. The Lord gave Joseph dreams about his glorious future, which Joseph shared with his brothers, all of which made his brothers even more envious of Joseph. Joseph however, lived with the awareness that the Lord was with him and watching over him.

As we have looked at in the previous chapters, our conscience is God's precious gift to us, that cautions us before we do wrong, convicts us when the deed is being done and worries us with guilt when we are done with wrong doing. When we like Joseph, are rejected by our family or society, we can be sure that the Lord is working out something amazing in our lives. The very people who despise us will one day come to us, to seek our favour and therefore there is no need to despair.

Many people are struggling with these intense emotions of jealousy. Notice how jealousy arises in our hearts only when we compare ourselves with others, their looks, their position, possessions etc. Most often our comparisons are only with those who are doing better than us, never with those who have much less than us. If we don't train ourselves to be content with what we have, we will be overpowered by jealousy. When feelings of jealousy, overtake us, we will find the voice of our conscience will be stifled and sometimes stilled within us, thereby prompting us to do things that are contrary to God's will and plans.

Joseph's brothers stood where he stood once

We read in **Acts 7:9** "*And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt; but God was with him.*" (ESV)

Though the evil deed of selling their own brother was done more than thirteen years ago, the brothers of Joseph stood convicted and condemned because of the voice of their conscience, which was awakened by their predicament, as they stood before the Governor of Egypt. The reason for their hatred towards Joseph was their intense feeling of jealousy, which when left uncontrolled, stilled the voice of their conscience.

The brothers of Joseph who treated him so unkindly and harshly now stood in exactly the same place before their brother, begging his benevolence. The only difference was that when Joseph begged for their mercy, they knew him but now they begged mercy to the Egyptian Governor, unaware that it was their own brother.

God can turn every unfavourable event to a favourable one, if only we listen and live in obedience to the voice of our conscience.

When anger overpowers our conscience

We read in **Genesis 4:4-5**, "*Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell.*" (ESV)

Cain and Abel desired to worship God and both of them presented an offering to the Lord. The Lord examined their hearts before he approved their offerings, and by so doing God accepted Abel and his offering while He rejected Cain and his offering. When God shunned Cain's offering, instead of feeling remorse, Cain was filled with anger towards God and his brother. Cain's anger was heightened by the thought that his brother found favour with God, and he did not.

We must keep in mind that God always looks deep into our heart, and can assess the true motive behind every action of ours. Like in Cain, the other emotion that is very strong in most of us is anger. Anger is a God given emotion, but if our anger is uncontrolled it displeases the Lord.

We read in **Genesis 4:6-7**, *"The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it."* (ESV)

God graciously spoke to Cain and cautioned him as to what lay ahead of him, and surely his own conscience spoke to him, but Cain's anger was so intense that it stilled the voice of God and his conscience. God being a loving God, encouraged him that if he did well, he too would be accepted but Cain was so filled with anger, he failed to hear God and chose not to respond to Him. Cain failed to heed God and the voice of his conscience, but he let his anger take control of his life. As God spoke to Cain, he remained silent and refused to respond back to God because anger had overpowered him. He had also decided beforehand, on what he would do to his brother Abel. Cain masked his anger, took his younger brother Abel to the field and killed him. When anger conquered Cain he did the unthinkable, and later pleaded with God that his life be spared.

Anger is good if it is for the right reason, but our anger should always be under control. Uncontrolled anger will ruin our lives, and the lives of those around us. Extreme anger will also smother the voice of conscience within us, and make us do things that we will most certainly regret later.

When lust overpowers our conscience

King David had many wives and many children. Among his children, some were blood brothers and sisters while others were half-brothers and half-sisters (which refers to those who had the same father but different mothers). David's son Absalom and David's daughter Tamar were half-brother and half-sister.

We read in **2 Samuel 13:1**, *"After this, Absalom the son of David had a beautiful sister whose name was Tamar, and Amnon the son of David fell in love with her."*(MEV)

Though Amnon was well aware of his relationship with Tamar, Amnon lusted after his sister Tamar because she was very beautiful. He was so infatuated by her beauty, that he was completely disoriented and obsessed by Tamar.

In **2 Samuel 13:3**, we read, *“But Amnon had a friend whose name was Jonadab son of Shimeah, David’s brother; and Jonadab was a very crafty man.”* (AMPC)

Amnon had a friend named Jonadab, who was a cunning man and when Amnon asked Jonadab for advice, he led him astray. He counselled Amnon to pretend to be sick, request that his sister Tamar be made to bring food and take care of him, so he could turn the situation to his advantage to have her as he desired. Amnon had a conscience that convicted him that what he craved for, and was about to do to his sister was a detestable thing. However, he was so overcome with his lust for Tamar, that he was not inclined to listen to the voice of his conscience. He went ahead and sexually abused Tamar, and the consequence he faced later was death. Amnon who could have been king in the place of his father David, was later avenged by Tamar’s brother Absalom who murdered him.

Many young people today are confused between the emotions of love and lust. Someone said it this way, *‘love is blind, but marriage is the eye-opener.’* When overtaken by lust, the emotions are heightened and our conscience becomes silent. We should also be cautious as to the kind of friends we choose to have. There are a lot of people who are crafty in their ways, and are being led by the evil one. If we go to such people for counsel, we can be sure that we will be misled into making wrong choices, and end up doing inappropriate things. Our counsellors and friends should always be godly people, who will lead us in the right ways of God.

In **Ephesians 4:31**, *“Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.”* (NIV)

If we study this verse closely, we see that there is a process explained; it begins with bitterness, which leads to rage and anger, resulting in quarrels, followed by slander which then opens the door to all forms of malice. Many are unaware of the evil power of bitterness, which if left unchecked as the word of God says, can be compared to a root that remains deeply embedded in our hearts, which then leads us into every form of malice.

We must be conscious of the emotions that rule our lives. We have looked at jealousy, anger and lust, all of which must be under the control of the Holy Spirit. We must never allow our emotions to overrule the voice of our conscience which the Lord has graciously placed inside of us.

Let us ask the Holy Spirit of God to awaken our conscience. As long as we live in this world we will constantly struggle with our emotions. But let us be mindful to not let the jealousy of Joseph’s brothers, the anger of Cain or the lust of Amnon overpower us. It is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that we can keep our emotions under control, and live our lives in a way that is completely pleasing to the Lord. Let us live in obedience to the prompting of the conscience that the Lord has instilled inside each one of us. Let us make it our goal to live like Jesus did, a life of holiness that pleases God in every way.

Freedom from Captivity

Chapter 18

A Good Conscience

We read in **Act 23:1**, *“And looking intently at the council, Paul said, “Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day.”(ESV)*

As the Apostle Paul stood on trial before the council of religious leaders, he bravely testified that he had lived his life before God with all good conscience. These leaders who tried Paul, were those who adhered to the Law of Moses meticulously, who were bound by religious traditions, but in reality had no personal relationship with God. No wonder then, that Jesus when He was here on earth, was indignant with these religious leaders and referred to them as white-washed tombs. Outwardly they were doing it all right, but inside they were filled with every form of evil. When Paul was confronted by these leaders, whose conscience was actually defiled, he courageously announced that his conscience was clear and untainted before God. Paul understood these religious leaders better than anyone else, as he himself as a Pharisee had once been a part of this group before He met the Lord.

We have looked at our conscience as a good thing God has placed inside of us, which serves as an internal audit to help us assess ourselves and live right. That is also the reason why when someone behaves unjustly, we refer to them as those who act against their conscience or have no conscience at all. Therefore, if we claim to have a good conscience, it would mean that all of our words, thoughts and actions that we engage in all through the week seen and unseen, are totally pleasing to God and have the Lord’s approval. Our desire must be to strive to lead lives that are transparent which the Lord favours and approves of, so that we can stand before Him with a clean conscience. The evil one’s crafty scheme is to trap us into sin, and then accuse us of wrong doing. In order to be overcomers we need God’s grace and strength, for only those who are victorious can stand before God with a good conscience. We must be determined to do nothing that would displease or dishonor the Lord in any way.

Paul’s testimony

In **Act 22:3** we read, *“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up here in Jerusalem as a student of Gamaliel. I received strict instruction in the Law of our ancestors and was just as dedicated to God as are all of you who are here today.” (GNB)*

In **Act 22:4**, we read, *“And I persecuted the followers of the Way, hounding some to death, arresting both men and women and throwing them in prison.” (NLT)*

This is the testimony of Paul that he shared with the members of the council. Paul, (who was earlier named Saul), was a religious Jew who underwent strict religious training and instruction in the Law of Moses under Gamaliel. Not only was he zealous about the traditions of his fathers, he was antagonistic to Jesus and his teachings. His mission was to arrest, persecute and put to death those who followed Jesus and His Way. Strange as it may seem, Paul did not think it wrong to even kill those who believed in Jesus, though he

believed in the Law of Moses which forbid murder, because Paul believed that he was doing God a favour by eradicating those who believed in Jesus. All of what Paul did, he did with a good conscience, in ignorance, not realizing he was doing wrong, because he believed with all his heart on what he had been taught.

Traditions that bind us today

Let us list some of the traditions that people follow today, all of which is done with a good conscience, but do need to be scrutinized to see if they are in keeping with God and His word. Many people observe lent, they fast for 40 days in a year, abstain from meat, drinking alcohol and try not to indulge in any sinful habits for that period of time. Some observe this strictly with the anticipation that by so doing, they can please God somehow, and can thereby receive favours from God. There are those who believe that irrespective of how they earn their money, if they go to church and give their tithes to God regularly, He will be pleased with them. There are those who have been taught that by repeating the Lord's Prayer for a certain number of time or certain phrases repeatedly, they will be blessed by God.

There is another tradition followed by many on what is called 'Palm Sunday'. If we recall that day Jesus entered triumphantly into Jerusalem on a donkey, the crowds followed him shouting 'hosanna to the Son of David' casting their garments and palm branches before Jesus. But sadly it was the same people who when Jesus stood trial before Pilate, shouted along with the Pharisees that Jesus be crucified. Not understanding the significance of what Jesus really did, many place their importance on the palms that are distributed on that Sunday. They believe that if they make a cross out of the palm leaf and fasten it to their door frames, they could ward off the attack of the evil one. Some have the habit of keeping their Bibles next to their pillow when they sleep, hoping that evil spirits will be kept at bay.

If we were to analyse our lives, we may realize that there are so many traditions that bind us and it seems almost impossible for us to be rid of them. It is a worthy reminder to all of us that these meaningless traditions will never save us from our sins, and the Lord is not pleased with them. The traditions we follow may be done with a good conscience, but they are of no value and are literally worthless in the sight of God.

So also the Jewish leaders in Jesus' day were so bound by the Law of Moses and blinded by the traditions that they had been taught, that they failed to recognize Jesus as the Messiah. The ones who got Jesus arrested and sent to be crucified were not the Romans but these Jewish leaders, the Pharisees, the scribes and chief priests. These were so blinded by their traditions, that they could not perceive who Jesus was, neither could they accept His teachings and were hostile to Him. They were so entrenched in what they had been taught, that they did not hesitate to do anything to those who did not subscribe to their teachings.

When Jesus came down to the earth to save mankind from their sins, He left or willingly gave up all the glory and splendour of heaven. If the Lord Jesus did not do that, there would be no way any of us could be saved and make it to heaven. The Lord who gave it all up for our sakes, is inviting us to abandon all the traditions, which we could otherwise call as our 'comfort zones' and follow Him. There are many who want to hold on to both Jesus and

their traditions, not realizing that it is an impossibility, as Jesus said in **Matthew 6:24**, “No one is able to serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and he will love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and he will despise the other. You are not able to serve God and mammon.” (BLB)

Paul’s encounter with Jesus

In **Act 22:6-8**, Paul says, “As I was traveling and coming near Damascus, about midday a bright light from the sky flashed suddenly around me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul! Why do you persecute me?’ ‘Who are you, Lord?’ I asked. ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you persecute,’ he said to me.”(GNT)

Paul who was then called Saul, had this amazing encounter with the risen Lord Jesus on the way to Damascus. Though Paul was ardently persecuting the people of God, when the Lord confronted Paul He asked him, ‘Saul, Saul why do you persecute me?’ Though the persecution was aimed at God’s people, the Lord considered it a directed towards Himself. It was this astonishing meeting with Jesus that made Paul realize that all the traditions he held on for so long were of no value in the sight of God. He had been actually fighting against God.

Whenever the people of God are persecuted, isn’t it an overwhelming thought to know that the Lord empathizes with us and regards it as being wronged Himself. In order to enter the Kingdom of God we too like Paul must have a personal relationship with Jesus, for He alone can transform us. We must not fear but be willing to discard all those traditions that the Lord does not approve of and only then we will see radical changes in our lives. Once we begin this journey of following Jesus, we will find that we will face opposition from all quarters because we will suddenly get noticed as those who truly follow Jesus. We must bear in mind that only the ones who follow the word of God and live in accordance to the will of God will enter heaven.

Transformation in Paul

Here’s what Paul says in **Philippians 3:8**, “Nothing is as wonderful as knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have given up everything else and count it all as garbage. All I want is Christ.” (CEV)

When Paul met Jesus Christ, everything else he held on to earlier became garbage or rubbish. In his ignorance he had earlier followed the traditions of men. The very faith that Paul tried to destroy, the Lord chose and called him to rebuild. The ones whom Paul hated and persecuted in his blindness, became the very ones that Paul dearly loved and built up.

Many are fearful of change because it goes against the grain of people around them, and the society they live in. If we seek to have a good conscience that is alignment with God and His word, then there is no room for double standards, we are called to let go of all those unnecessary traditions that profit us nothing.

In **2 Timothy 1:12**, Paul says *“For which cause I suffer also these things: yet I am not ashamed; for I know him whom I have believed.”* (ASV) and in **Philippians 1:21**, he goes on to say further *“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”*(ESV)

The change that the Lord brought in Paul was so astounding, that Paul no longer considered sufferings for Christ as something to be ashamed of. The one who persecuted the people of God was now ready, and willing to be persecuted for the cause of Christ. He was even ready to face death, because He knew whom He had believed, and knew that death was not the end, but would only be his gain as he would be with Jesus for all eternity.

Before his conversion Paul followed the traditions of men with a good conscience, and persecuted the church of God. However, after that encounter with Jesus, Paul’s good conscience was totally depending on God and His word. He was used by the Lord to build the church that he once so vehemently destroyed.

And so we need to ask ourselves another question, *‘who is guiding our conscience?’* If we live only for worldly positions, possession, fame and earthly blessings, seeking to compromise with the standards of this world, we will never obtain a good and clean conscience. Instead of being ardent about our church, the building, our caste, our language, our work etc., we must chose to be zealous only about the Lord. Sadly, the major hindrance for many to come to believe and follow the Lord Jesus, is not those outside the church, but those of us within. We have failed to live consistent lives in obedience to the Lord and His word, thereby forsaking a good conscience. Like Paul each of us should be able to stand and testify as he did before the council in **Acts 23:1**, that *‘we have lived our lives before God in all good conscience’*. When we live this way, others will certainly see the difference in our lives and will earnestly desire to follow Jesus and become His disciples.

Freedom from Captivity

Chapter 19

Are You Just A Sunday Christian?

We read in **Luke 23:43**, Jesus said to him, "I can guarantee this truth: Today you will be with me in paradise." (GW)

These are the words of Lord Jesus as he hung on the cross, to the thief who hung on a cross adjacent to Him. In his last dying moments, as the man called out to Lord Jesus to have mercy on him, these were the comforting words of Lord Jesus to him. Our Lord Jesus assured him that there was a certainty of life after death, and He also ensured him that he would have a place with Him in paradise.

In **Luke 16:23** we read, "And in Hades he lifted up his eyes as he was in torment and saw Abraham from a distance, and Lazarus at his side." (LEB)

For a background to the above mentioned verse, this was an incident that Jesus shared with the people about a rich man and a poor man named Lazarus. In this event, Jesus is talking about a place called Hades or Hell that the rich man found himself in after his death, a place of intense torment.

Many people in the world today live complacently, completely engrossed in the temporal, giving no thought whatsoever to what lies ahead after their death. There are others who when faced with struggles and hardships decide that the only option for them is to end their own lives, not realizing that their life is not just for here and now, but that they have a soul that lives on to eternity. As much as our physical life on earth is a reality, we must constantly remind ourselves that the life after death is also a reality. The important thing to realize is that while paradise is a place of joy and comfort, hell or hades is a place of unending agony and torment.

In **Luke 16:19** we read, "There was a certain rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day:" (Webster)

This is the description that Jesus gave about the man mentioned in the verse above; He was a rich man, dressed in expensive clothes, ate the best of food and had a good house. Here was a man who had everything that a person on earth would wish and desire to have.

In **Luke 16:20-21**, we read, "And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, who was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores." (Webster)

If one were to compare the poor beggar Lazarus with the rich man, he had a very pathetic life. He was a poor man, with no proper clothes, a body filled with sores, had no food and longed to be fed from crumbs that fell from the rich man's table, he was also so weak that he couldn't even drive away the dogs that came and licked his sores. Obviously he had no home as he lay helplessly at the gate of the rich man. However the Lord referred to the poor

man by his name Lazarus, which means 'God is my helper' and true to the meaning of his name, God helped him.

Both of them died, but after his death the rich man went to Hades while Lazarus was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. Strangely the Bible says that when the rich man looked up from the place of torment, he recognized Abraham and Lazarus in paradise. The fact that he identified Abraham implies that he must have been familiar with the scriptures and probably went to the temple regularly. Though he was a man with great affluence and pomp, the Lord Jesus did not even care to mention his name, except for the fact that he was a rich man.

The rich man had his trust placed entirely on his wealth and didn't care one bit about poor Lazarus. When the Lord looked at the rich man, he perceived him as one in deep poverty with no empathy whatsoever for the one who was destitute and helpless. Moreover the rich man had the wrong understanding that because of the kind of wealth he possessed, he could continue to live in ease and extravagance forever. The poor man Lazarus on the other hand had to depend on the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table for his very sustenance.

In **Luke 12:21**, *"Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God."* (NLT)

The Lord calls him a fool who has all of the worldly wealth, is so obsessed and enthralled by it, that he misses out on having a relationship with the God of the universe. There are so many who are simply satisfied with the thought that all is going well with them, and do not care to reach out the lost, the sick, needy or anyone else.

The Priest and Levite who walked away

In **Luke 10:31-32**, we read, *"It so happened that a priest was going down that road; but when he saw the man, he walked on by on the other side. In the same way a Levite also came there, went over and looked at the man, and then walked on by on the other side."*(GNB)

Jesus shared the parable of the Good Samaritan, where a man was waylaid by robbers who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him and left him half dead. We notice how both the Priest and the Levite, probably going on to perform their duties at the temple, chose to walk away and ignore a helpless man in need, while that was the precise reason they were called by God.

The Good Samaritan on the other hand was a picture of Jesus who stopped, bound the wounds of the man with wine and oil, put him on his own donkey and took him to the safety of an inn. In doing so, his work was disrupted but he knew what his real purpose was. So too, the purpose of the church is that we be a blessing and serve those outside who are in all kinds of needs. When we meet those wounded people on the way, those whom Satan has robbed of their joy, peace, health etc., instead of walking away, let us take time to reach out and bring them into fellowship of a church.

The bondage of being content with church attendance only

There are many who are simply content with being members of a church where they worship regularly, give their tithes and offerings, being content with thought that they have an institution where they can get their children married and their funerals taken care of. Here's a word of caution to such, if we know the word of God, but have no personal relationship with the Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, we too like the rich man are destined for hell. Our church attendance is of no value, if there is no transformation in our everyday lives, and if we don't go and share the good news of the gospel to those outside. If our only goal is to receive all God's blessings and keep it to ourselves and don't share the love of Jesus and the salvation he offers to those needy ones outside the gates of our church, we too are selfish and in no way better than the rich man who kept all the good things God bestowed on him to himself. We may not realize it, but this is a bondage the Lord must free us from. It is only when we are freed from this bondage can we be a blessing to others.

The rich man was probably renowned and accomplished but the Lord did not even care to mention his name. Though Lazarus was a poor and destitute man, he must have had great faith in God, for the Lord was mindful to mention his name. He may not have been able to go to church, but right where he was he must have sought after the Lord. Like the poor beggar we may be those not recognized by society, but the point we must ponder is, whether the Lord know us, for only then are we assured of a place in paradise.

There are so many leading self-centred and self-indulgent lives, amassing wealth, never considering the needs of those around, not grasping the reality that when we die they can take nothing with them. It is only when we come to terms with this fact, will we change the way we live. Our physical death is not an end in itself, it is the beginning of an eternal life in either one of two destinations, paradise or hell. In order to get to paradise, it is imperative that we live the life of obedience to the word of God as Jesus commanded us to. Our zeal must not be for the church we attend or for leaders, our caste or language but our zeal must be only for the Lord.

We read in **James 4:17**, *"If, however, a man knows what it is right to do and yet does not do it, he commits a sin."* (WNT) James explains it this way, sin is not only doing wrong things but if we don't do the right things (acts of love and service to others) deliberately, that too is sin.

Many people downplay the incident of the rich man and Lazarus because they don't want to believe that there is a place called hell. This is not a parable as some would like to think, but an event Lord Jesus Himself explained as He went on to specifically mention the names of Lazarus, Abraham and Moses. Two destinations were also clearly portrayed, hades or hell where the rich man ended up in and paradise where Lazarus was seen with Abraham. Let us not deceive ourselves to believe that there is no life after death or that there is no place called hell. It is only when we keep these two destinations in perspective, will we be guided to live in a way that is pleasing to God.

In **Luke 16:22**, we read, *"So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried."*(NKJV)

When the poor man died, his body might have been unclaimed, but he was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. On the other hand the rich man might have had a good burial with much honour but he ended up in hell.

There are so many who are gripped with the fear of death, but for those who believe in the Lord Jesus and live in obedience to His word, we have the assurance that we will be with the Lord forever.

In **Luke 16:23-24**, we read, *"And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. "Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.'"*(CSB)

As the rich man agonized in hell, he looked up and recognized Abraham and Lazarus and was in total shock. He begged Abraham to have mercy on him, to send Lazarus to dip his finger and place a drop of water on his tongue to cool it down, as the heat and torment in hell was unbearable. The one who didn't care to show sympathy to poor Lazarus, was now in a place begging for benevolence. If we turn away from those who are in dire straits, one day we too will call on the Lord and receive no favour or mercy from Him.

We read in **Luke 16: 25-27**, *But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.'* *"Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, or I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.'* (NKJV)

Our physical death spells a finality, and there is no way anyone can make changes or redo those things that were left undone after we die. The rich man begged Abraham to send Lazarus back to earth to warn his brothers, but it was too late. We must be burdened for the lost while here on earth. Let us make the best use of this life the Lord has gifted to us, to share the good news with others, serve the needy, wipe their tears and pray for others, for only then will we find our way to the place that the Lord has prepared for those who love Him. Life after death is a certainty, and we can choose to be in either one of two places forever. We can live with the Lord in that place of unexplainable joy where He reigns forever as Lord Almighty or the place of unending turmoil and agony, shut out from the Lord's presence forever. The decision is ours, and it has to be made while we are here on earth.

Freedom from Captivity

Chapter 20

A Conscience that is seared

*In **1 Timothy 4:1-2**, we read, “The Spirit says clearly that some people will abandon the faith in later times; they will obey lying spirits and follow the teachings of demons. Such teachings are spread by deceitful liars, whose consciences are dead, as if burnt with a hot iron.” (GNT)*

Our conscience is that precious gift that God has placed inside each one of us, so as to discern right from wrong. The purpose of our conscience is to counsel and sensitize us when we do wrong, and to prompt us to do what is right and pleasing to the Lord while here on earth, as one day we must all stand before the judgement seat of God and give an account for all that we did in our life time.

In **1 Timothy 4:1-2**, Paul explained how in the last days, many people will lead lives wherein their conscience is seared or dead. The searing of our conscience can be compared to using an overheated iron box on a fabric and getting it completely burnt or ruined. Just like a burnt dress will be of no use, no matter how expensive it was when we bought it, so also if we constantly still the voice of our conscience and choose to deliberately keep on sinning, there will come a time when our conscience will become ineffectual to us. This searing of the conscience does not happen all at once, but is gradual process that pulls a person on the downward path, and often the person involved does not even realize where it all began.

Learning from Lot’s life

Lot journeyed with Abraham

In **Genesis 12:4** we read, *“When Abram was seventy-five years old, he started out from Haran, as the LORD had told him to do; and Lot went with him.” (GNT)*

God called Abraham to come out of the land of Haran, to the land that the Lord had promised for Abraham and his descendants to possess, and Lot who was Abraham’s brother’s son accompanied him on this journey, because Lot perceived that God was with Abraham. Both of them started out on this faith journey not knowing what lay ahead of them, but simply trusting the fact that the God who called them was faithful.

We further read in **Genesis 13:5** that *“Lot also had sheep, goats, and cattle, as well as his own family and servants.” (GNB)*

The call and promise of God was to Abraham, but because Lot associated himself with Abraham, he too received God’s abundant blessings. The Lord blessed Lot, just like He did Abraham with sheep, goats and cattle as well as giving him his own family and servants.

When we associate with children of God their blessings will become ours as well, but on the other hand if we cohort with the wrong people, we will miss out on all the blessings that

God intended for us to have. If we partner with people of faith, spending time with those who speak words of faith, our faith too will grow and we will be strengthened.

This also applies to those who are addicted to news channels, which may seem harmless on the surface. The fact of the matter is that most of these channels thrive on broadcasting bad news, and by constant exposure to such information, our minds are invariably filled with fear and anxiety. Therefore, instead of filling our minds with the atrocities that are happening around us, we should learn to discipline ourselves to read and hear words of faith from the word of God, which alone can strengthen our walk of faith.

Proverbs 13:20 says it this way, *“Keep company with the wise and you will become wise. If you make friends with stupid people, you will be ruined.”* (GNB)

If we desire to have wisdom and act wisely, we must have as our accomplice those who are wise. There are times when we encounter an adverse situation, and the Lord strengthens our faith through the prayer and encouragement of fellow believers. Simultaneously if we are also in close friendship with someone else, who speaks negatively of the same situation, and we give heed to that person, allowing their scepticism to influence us, we will soon find that our faith begins to dwindle. If we are eager for our faith to grow, it is important that we choose to be in the company of those who are walking, and exercising their faith in God every day.

Lot parted ways with Abraham

In **Genesis 13:7**, we read, *“And there was an argument between the keepers of Abram’s cattle and the keepers of Lot’s cattle.”*(BBE)

Lot was blessed greatly by the Lord because of his partnership with Abraham, but as their livestock increased on both sides, there was a dispute that arose between Abraham’s herdsmen and Lot’s herdsmen. The disputes led to arguments between the two parties, which ultimately lead to their separation.

We read further in **Genesis 13:11**, *“So Lot chose the whole Jordan Valley for himself and moved away toward the east. That is how the two men parted.”* (GNB)

Lot chose the Jordan Valley purely based on what he beheld with his physical eyes, but the moment Lot parted from Abraham, he began to lose out on all the blessings that were his earlier, when he remained in fellowship with Abraham.

The dispute among the disciples of Jesus

In **Luke 22:24**, we read of *“An argument broke out among the disciples as to which one of them should be thought of as the greatest.”* (GNB)

There were disputes even among the disciples of Jesus. If we were to study the background to this verse, we find that Jesus had just then celebrated the Passover meal and predicted to his disciples that he was going to suffer and die for the sins of all mankind. The disciples paid

no heed to Jesus' agony, but were busy arguing as to who would be the greatest. The disciples had the best master, teacher and example in Jesus, but even they allowed the enemy to sow seeds of disunity and discord among themselves.

There is so much of division today in families, church and society. Generally when there is a problem in the church, the blame is thrown on the pastor. In many families, husbands and wives are opting out of their marriages over insignificant arguments and misunderstanding. This is only because, they have not realized that separation is totally against God's will, and plan for families. Divisions are always the clever scheme of Satan, as his ultimate goal is to bring in dissension and disharmony in every relationship.

Many families have stopped going to church, missing out on being in fellowship with other believers, only because they wish to avoid any sort of disagreements and disputes that prevail in a fellowship. They therefore opt to stay at home, and watch messages and programs that are televised in the comfort of their homes. God's word exhorts us in **Hebrews 10:25**, *"Let us not give up the habit of meeting together, as some are doing. Instead, let us encourage one another all the more, since you see that the Day of the Lord is coming nearer."*(GNT). There is no church, pastor or group of believers who are perfect, as we all have faults and failings, but the good news is that we are all moving on towards perfection.

Lot moved towards Sodom

In **Genesis 13:12-13**, we read, *"Abram stayed in the land of Canaan, and Lot settled among the cities in the valley and camped near Sodom, whose people were wicked and sinned against the LORD."*(GNT)

The Bible described Sodom as a land whose people were wicked and who sinned against the Lord, and it was toward this land that Lot moved. As Lot set his camp outside of Sodom, he must have observed the evil and treacherous ways of the people of that city. Lot continued to live in the vicinity of Sodom and over a period of time, he too became complacent and began to move towards becoming a citizen of Sodom.

When King David fell

David was a mighty king, a worshipper of God and a wonderful person. But at the time of war David decided to stay back in his palace. Lazing around one afternoon, he let his eyes roam and saw a beautiful woman, the wife of Uriah, with whom he committed adultery, and from then on it was a downward spiral for David. He plotted and killed Uriah and in spite of all his wrong doing he felt no remorse whatsoever, as he had stilled the voice of his conscience and in the bargain seared his conscience. It was only when the prophet Nathan confronted him, did David repent and seek the Lord for mercy and forgiveness as he expressed his grief in Psalm 51.

The searing of one's conscience does not happen overnight, but gets there as a result of wilful disobedience to the voice of God and the word of God. There's much obscenity that is portrayed both on the television and internet that we need to be cautious about. If one

justifies themselves to view these profane images as harmless entertainment, there will come a time when their conscience will be seared, and they will have stilled the voice of God completely in their lives. It is better to nip these bondages in the bud, rather than let them grow and become a snare to our soul.

Like Lot and David it is possible for any one of us to fall into sin and be in a place where we can still the voice of our conscience. In matters pertaining to relating to the opposite gender, irrespective of how young or old we are, we must exercise discretion, avoid being together alone, as both men and women are vulnerable to fall into this snare. Sin will never overtake us suddenly but it will over a period of time, if left unchecked, overpower us and enslave us. Today many people have gotten into relationships through social media, and what started off as a casual friendship, has landed many in immorality and adultery. When the conditions are conducive a small seed can grow and become a huge plant, so also a small sin that is left unrestrained can become a tool in Satan's hand to ensnare and enslave us into bondage.

Lot moved into Sodom

We read in **Genesis 14:12**, *“Lot, Abram's nephew, was living in Sodom, so they took him and all his possessions.”* (GNB)

Lot first camped outside Sodom, and later moved into Sodom, for we read in **Genesis 14:12** that when Kings from other nations attacked Sodom, they carried away Lot and all his possessions.

In **Genesis 19:1**, *“When the two angels came to Sodom that evening, Lot was sitting at the city gate.”* (GNB)

Later as we read in **Genesis 19**, Lot was sitting at the gate, probably now an elder in the city of Sodom, because it was the elders who generally sat at the city gate. If we observe the sequence of events, we realize how Lot was gradually lured into Sodom, whereby soon his entire family became a part and parcel of this sinful city.

If we yearn to have a good conscience before the Lord, we must be sensitive to the gentle promptings of the Holy Spirit of God in our lives, and seek to set right anything that is not pleasing to Him. If we allow those so called inconsequential sins to grow, we will soon come to a stage where we can no longer hear the voice of our conscience, and will be in danger of being ensnared by the evil one, who will destroy us.

Lot guarded himself but his wife was ensnared

In the midst of all the sin and wickedness of Sodom, Lot was able to protect himself and be a righteous man, but Lot was not alone, he had his wife and children. When the Lord decided to destroy Sodom, He graciously took Lot, his wife and children out of Sodom, but Lot's wife was so captivated by Sodom, that she looked back and became a pillar of salt. Lot's daughters had become so used to the immoralities of Sodom, that they did the detestable thing by sleeping with their own father, in order to have offspring, as their conscience also

was seared with time from being associated with the wicked and adulterous lifestyle they witnessed while living in the land of Sodom.

Here's a word of caution to parents. The wrong choices we make in life will have adverse effects on our children, and for the generations to come. Our children observe us and imitate our actions. If we do not lead virtuous lives, our children will do the same irrespective of how much we tell them or warn them about what is right and wrong. The Lord wants us to be the salt of the earth, but if we live in disobedience to the voice of the Lord and our conscience, we too like Lot's wife will become a pillar of salt, of no use to anyone. Let us surrender our lives to the Lord, give no room for compromise, be cautious in all our relationships and yearn to have a healthy and good conscience. Daily let us discipline ourselves to give heed to the voice of God, live in obedience to the word of God, and the gentle promptings of the Holy Spirit.

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