



GAINING
G**D'S**
APPROVAL



Zac Poonen

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by

Zac Poonen

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Paperback ISBN: 9789190565820

ePub ISBN: 9789384302290

Kindle ISBN: 9789384302603

PDF ISBN: 9789384302917

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Lord, Give Me Light

- 1.If I have not forsaken all
In answer to Thy loving call;
If I've kept something back from Thee,
Lord, give me light, that I might see.
- 2.Lord, help me judge myself each day,
To walk this new and living way.
I seek Thy grace with all my heart,
To be made pure, just as Thou art.
If anything upon this earth
Attracts me with its sense of worth;
If money has a hold on me,
Lord, give me light, that I might see.
- 3.If all my life revolves round me
And thoughts of my own family;
If I am living selfishly,
Lord, give me light, that I might see.
- 4.Is there some good I should have done?
Is there some soul I should have won?
Have I hurt someone thoughtlessly?
Lord, give me light, that I might see.
- 5.If someone's failure has not wrought
Concern and care within my heart;
If I've judged others inwardly,
Lord, give me light, that I might see.

6.If I have cared for man's applause,
Or sought my own and shunned the cross;
If I have feared man's mockery,
Lord, give me light, that I might see.

7.If I've not sought Thy pow'r in prayer,
Because of earthly toils and care;
If I'm not longing after Thee,
Lord, give me light, that I might see.

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CHAPTER 1

Called, Chosen and Faithful

It is one thing to be accepted by God; it is quite another thing to be APPROVED by God.

The Faithful Remnant

The book of Revelation speaks of the triumph of the Lamb of God. But we are told that the Lamb has an army of disciples through whom He fights His battles and overcomes. These disciples are called, chosen and faithful.

“The Lamb is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful” (Revelation 17:14).

Many are called, few are chosen, but fewer still are faithful. These are the overcomers spoken of ten times in the book of Revelation. They are disciples of Jesus who have not only been accepted by God but who have been tested by Him through many circumstances and who have been approved by Him.

There were many who believed in Jesus when He was on earth, but He did not commit Himself to all of them.

“When Jesus was in Jerusalem ... many believed in His name, beholding His signs which He was doing. But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men” (John 2:23, 24).

Jesus knew that the vast majority of those who believed in Him still sought their own and came to Him only for personal blessings. Their sins had been forgiven but they did not desire to be overcomers. To be an overcomer one must long to be free from seeking one's own.

When Gideon gathered an army to fight the enemies of Israel, he had 32,000 men with him. But God knew that they were not all wholehearted. And so God whittled them down. The fearful were sent home first. But 10,000 still remained. These were then taken down to the river and tested. Only 300 passed the test and were approved by God (*Judges 7:1–8*).

The way those 10,000 people drank water from the river to alleviate their thirst was the means God used to determine who qualified to be in Gideon's army. Little did they realise that they were being tested. 9700 of them forgot all about the enemy while kneeling down to satisfy their thirst. Only 300 of them remained on their feet, alert, drinking the water with cupped hands.

Tested in Daily Life

It is in the ordinary things of life that God tests us – in our attitude to money, pleasure, earthly honour

and comfort etc. Like Gideon's army, we too don't often realise that God is testing us.

Jesus warned us not to be weighed down with the cares of this world. He said,

“Be on guard, that your hearts may not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day come on you suddenly like a trap” (Luke 21:34).

Paul exhorted the Corinthian Christians saying,

“From now on both those who have wives should be as though they had none; and those who weep, as though they did not weep; and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as though they did not possess; and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form of this world is passing away ... I say this to secure your undistracted devotion to the Lord” (1 Corinthians 7:29–35).

We must not allow anything of this world to distract us from total devotion to the Lord. The legitimate things of the world are a greater snare than the sinful things – because the legitimate things look so innocent and harmless!!

We can alleviate our thirst – but we must cup our hands and drink just the bare minimum necessary. Our mind is to be set on the things above and not on things of earth. We have to forsake all if we are to be disciples of Jesus.

Like a rubber-band that is stretched, our mind can attend to the things of earth that are necessary. But once those things have been attended to, like the rubber-band springing back to its normal position, when released from its tension, our minds too should spring back to the things of the Lord and of eternity. This is what it means to have our mind “set on things above and not on the things that are on earth” (*Colossians 3:2*).

With many believers, however, the rubber-band works the other way. Their minds are stretched now and then to think about eternal things and when released, come back to their normal mode of being occupied with the things of this world!

Approved By God

Paul exhorted Timothy saying,

“No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier”
(2 Timothy 2:4).

Paul was not telling Timothy there how to be saved but how he could be an effective soldier of Christ.

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God”, Paul told him (*2 Timothy 2:15*). Timothy had already been accepted by God. He now needed to be diligent gain God’s approval.

Paul himself had been placed in the Christian ministry by Christ because he had gained God’s approval.

He says,

“I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service” (1 Timothy 1:12).

Paul was among the called, chosen AND FAITHFUL – and he longed that Timothy should be in that number too.

But Paul had been tested before he was approved.

We are being tested too.

God never commits Himself to anyone before testing him.

The accounts given us in the Scriptures of the testing of various men – some of whom were approved and some of whom were rejected – can therefore be of great value to us, for they have been written for our instruction.

CHAPTER 2

Well-Pleasing to the Father

In the New Testament, we read of One with Whom the Father was well-pleased, and also of a group of people with whom God was not well-pleased. A study of this contrast is most interesting.

God was Not Well-Pleased with Them

Of the 600,000 Israelites who perished in the wilderness in their unbelief, it is written that “God was not well-pleased with them” (*1 Corinthians 10:5*).

Those Israelites had been redeemed out of Egypt by the blood of the lamb (symbolic of our redemption through Christ), they had been baptised in the Red Sea and in the cloud (symbolic of baptism in water and baptism in the Holy Spirit) (*1 Corinthians 10:2*). Yet God was not happy with them.

God was nevertheless very good to them, in that He provided all their physical and material needs supernaturally. “Your clothing did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years”, Moses told them at the end of their forty years of wanderings (*Deuteronomy 8:4*).

God healed all their sicknesses too. The Bible says, that “there were no sick and feeble folk among them” (*Psalms 105:37* - TLB).

God did many miracles for them. In fact, no single group of people in the world's history has ever seen as many miracles as those unbelieving Israelites did, with whom “God was angry for forty years” (*Hebrews 3:17*).

This teaches us that God answers the prayers of carnal believers too – and that He provides them with their earthly needs, even supernaturally if necessary. The fact that God does a miracle for us proves nothing about our spirituality. It only proves that God is a good God Who makes His sun shine on the righteous and the unrighteous alike!

Jesus also warned us that in the final day of judgment, many who had done miracles in His Name would be rejected and disqualified because they had lived in sin. He said,

“Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practise lawlessness’” (*Matthew 7:22, 23*).

He was obviously referring to Christian preachers and healers who did genuine miracles in His Name. From the words of Jesus, it becomes clear that MANY of these men (not just a few and not all, but many) who have these miraculous ministries are not free from sin in their private lives and in their thoughts

and attitudes. This will be exposed at the judgment-seat of Christ.

This teaches us very clearly that the working of miracles, by itself, is no indication that a man is approved by God. Have we understood this thoroughly? If not, we will be deceived.

God was Well-Pleased with Him

In contrast to the Israelites in the Old Testament with whom God was not well-pleased, we read of Jesus in the New Testament that the Father was well-pleased with Him.

When Jesus was thirty, the Father spoke these words about Him publicly from heaven, “This is my beloved Son in Whom I am well-pleased” (*Matthew 3:17*). And that was at a time when Jesus had not done a single miracle or even preached a single sermon!

What then was the secret of His being approved by God? It was obviously not because of His ministry, for He had not even commenced His public ministry. It was because of the type of life that He had lived for thirty years.

We are approved by God not on the basis of the success of our ministry but rather on the basis of our faithfulness in the temptations that we face in daily life.

The only two things that we are told about the hidden thirty years of Jesus' life (apart from the incident in the temple) are – that “He was tempted in all points as we are and yet did not sin” (*Hebrews 4:15*), and that “He never pleased Himself” (*Romans 15:3*).

He had faithfully resisted temptation at every point and He had never sought His own in any matter. This was what delighted the Father.

Our external accomplishments may impress worldly people and carnal believers. But God is impressed only by our character. It is our character alone that can bring us God's approval. And so if we want to know what God's opinion of us is, we must deliberately erase from our minds what we have accomplished in our ministry, and evaluate ourselves purely by our attitude towards sin and self-centredness in our thought-life. That and that alone is the infallible gauge of our spiritual condition.

Thus, the world-travelling healer/preacher and the busy mother who is never able to leave the confines of her home, have exactly the same opportunities to acquire God's approval.

This is why we shall find at the judgment-seat of Christ that many who are first here in the Christian world will be last there and many who were considered last here on earth (because they did not have a well-recognised ministry) will be first there!

Faithfulness at Home and at Work

Jesus is our Example in all things. The Father had arranged for Jesus to spend the first thirty years of His earthly life in two places basically – His home and His place of work (the carpentry shop). It was Jesus' faithfulness in these two places that brought forth the approval of the Father. This is a matter of great encouragement for us, for we all find ourselves in these two places constantly – our home and our

place of work. And it is in these two places basically that God tests us.

Jesus's home was a poor home. Joseph and Mary were so poor that they could not even afford to offer a lamb as a burnt offering. The Law had commanded that "if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two young pigeons..." (*Leviticus 12:8*). And Joseph and Mary took "according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons'" (*Luke 2:24*).

Jesus had at least four brothers and two sisters, younger to Him living in the same house. *Mark 6:3* tells us that the people of his home-town remarked concerning Jesus, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses, and Judas, and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?"

One can imagine the pressures and struggles that Jesus faced as He grew up in that poor home.

To top it all, his younger brothers were unbelievers. It is written that, "not even His brothers were believing in Him" (*John 7:5*).

They must have taunted Him in many ways. He had no private room in his house to retreat to, when facing the pressure of temptation from others in the house. There must have been the fighting and the squabbling and the scolding and the selfishness (common to all homes) in that home too. And amid such circumstances, Jesus was tempted in all points as we are; and He never sinned even once in deed, word, thought, attitude or motive or in any other way.

If Jesus had come in some different form than us, in some flesh that was incapable of being tempted, then there would have been no virtue in his living in

purity in such circumstances. But He was made like us in all things.

The Word of God says,

“He HAD TO BE MADE like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God” (Hebrews 2:17).

He has undergone the pressure of every temptation that we can ever face. This is what gives us great encouragement in the moments when we are tempted, that we too can overcome. This is the hope that Satan seeks to rob us of, by trying to hide from us this glorious truth that Christ came in our flesh and was tempted exactly as we are.

As a carpenter in Nazareth, Jesus must have faced the temptations that all who engage in any form of business face. But He would never deceive anyone to whom He sold anything. He would never demand too much for any article and He would never compromise on any point of righteousness, whatever the cost (or loss) to Him may have been. He was not in competition with the other carpenters in Nazareth. He only worked to earn His living. Thus, through buying and selling and the handling of money (as a carpenter), Jesus faced all the temptations that we face in the area of money. And He overcame.

Jesus lived in submission to imperfect foster-parents for so many years. This must have exposed Him to various forms of inward temptations (in the realm of attitudes); and yet He never sinned. Joseph and Mary were still under the old covenant, and so

they certainly did not have victory over sin. They must have raised their voices and argued with each other, just like all married couples who don't have victory do. Jesus, on the other hand, was living in perfect victory. Yet He never despised them. If He had, He would have sinned. He respected them, even though He was far purer than them. There we see the beauty of His humility.

Thus we see, that far from living an uneventful life during those thirty years in Nazareth, Jesus was in the midst of a conflict against temptation all the time – a conflict that increased in intensity as each year went by – for the Father had to take the Captain of our salvation through the entire range of temptations possible to human beings, before He could become our Saviour and our High Priest.

God's Word says,

“It was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings” (Hebrews 2:10).

There were still a few temptations (such as the ones that come through nation-wide fame etc.), that Jesus would face in the last three and a half years of His earthly life. But the common temptations that we all face at home and in our place of work, He had encountered and overcome in the first thirty years. And the Father gave Jesus His certificate of approval at His baptism.

If only our eyes were opened to see the basis on which God gives us His approval, it would

revolutionize our lives totally. No longer would any of us covet a worldwide ministry but rather faithfulness in the moments of temptation in daily life. We would stop admiring physical miracles and start admiring transformed lives. Thus our minds would be renewed to have our priorities right.

What a tremendous encouragement this is, to know that God's greatest rewards and His highest commendations are reserved for those who face temptation with the same attitude that Jesus faced it – that is:

“I would rather die than commit a sin or disobey My Father at even one point.”

This is the meaning of the exhortation in *Philippians 2:5–8*, which says,

“Have this attitude in you which was in Christ Jesus ... Who became obedient even to the point of death.”

Thus all of us have the same opportunity to be overcomers and to be among the called, chosen and faithful, irrespective of our gift or our ministry, and irrespective of our sex or our age.

CHAPTER 3

The Testing of Adam and Eve

God had great plans in mind for Adam and Eve, when He created them. But these plans could not be fulfilled apart from their being tested. And so He placed in Eden an attractive tree with luscious fruit called the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And He forbade Adam and Eve from eating of it.

The failure of Adam and Eve in Eden was primarily a failure of faith. Faith is the total leaning of the human personality on God, in total confidence in His perfect wisdom, love and power. Eve failed to have such a confidence in God and was thus lured by Satan into disobeying God's command.

Confidence in God's Wisdom

Satan suggested to Eve that there was a flaw in God's wisdom in not allowing them to eat of that tree.

God had not given Adam any reason why the tree was forbidden. Faith never needs to have a reason for obeying God. It is our intellect that demands to know the reason first. Obedience to God must always be the obedience of faith, not the obedience of reason.

Paul said that he had been called “to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles”

(Romans 1:5). He also said that the “preaching of Jesus Christ had been made known to all the nations, leading to the obedience of faith” (Romans 16:25, 26).

Our intellect is the enemy of faith, as is clear from Proverbs 3:5:

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart (not ‘head’) and do not depend on your own intellect.”

The wisdom of God is hidden from the clever and the intelligent and revealed by the Spirit to those who simply believe like little babes. Jesus said,

“I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes” (Matthew 11:25).

The intellect is a good servant but a bad master; and so its proper God appointed place is as the servant of the spirit in man – the spirit itself being subject to the Holy Spirit.

God gave Adam no reason as to why he could not eat of the forbidden tree, because He wanted to develop Adam's faith in Him. And this is the first area where God tests us too. Can we obey Him even when we cannot understand why He calls us to do something? What about when God calls us to do something that our reason tells us is unnecessary?

When Jesus asked Peter to step out of the boat and to walk on the water, that command was contrary to everything that Peter's reason told him. But if he had

followed reason, he would never have experienced that miracle.

One could quote many such instances from the Scriptures. And here lies the reason for the powerlessness of many Christians and why many believers never experience the supernatural workings of God in their lives. They live by reason and not by faith.

Confidence in God's Love

Faith is also a total confidence in God's love. Satan suggested to Eve that God did not love them sufficiently and that this was why He had kept that lovely fruit out of bounds for them.

If Eve had been living by faith and not by reason, she would have replied,

“Well, Satan, I don't understand why God has told us not to eat of that tree. But I am certain of one thing – that God loves us intensely; and so I am sure that He will never withhold any good thing from us. So, if he has forbidden this fruit, there must be a very good reason for it, that has our good in view.”

That would have been the answer of faith. But instead she fell for the Devil's lie.

It is only the shield of faith in God's perfect love for us that “can extinguish every flaming missile of the Evil One” (Ephesians 6:16).

All discouragement and depression are the result of living by reason and not by faith. All anxiety and fear also have their roots in the same cause. God

allows us to be tested – to be tempted to doubt His love, when He withdraws from us the ‘feelings’ of His manifest presence with us – so that we can be strong in faith and thus come to the place of maturity where He can fulfil His purposes through us.

God made that tree of knowledge of good and evil attractive because it was only thus that Adam and Eve could be tested. Would they reject something so attractive, in favour of God? Or would they reject God and choose what pleased themselves?

This is the choice that faces us too in the moments of temptation. And that’s why God has permitted temptation to be so attractive. It is only when we reject some forbidden thing that is really attractive, and to which we feel tremendously drawn and which we know can give us pleasure, that we prove that we love God wholeheartedly.

It is also thus that we prove our faith in God’s perfect love – believing that what God has forbidden He has done in perfect love for our very best. Thus every temptation to sin and to disobey God becomes a trial of our faith. To live by faith is to believe that every commandment of God has come from a heart of perfect love that desires the very best for us.

When God gave the Israelites the ten commandments, Moses told them,

“God has come to test you” (Exodus 20:20).

It says in *Deuteronomy 33:2, 3,*

“At God’s right hand there was a fiery Law for them. Indeed (this proves that) He loves the people.”

Would they believe that this fiery law was a proof of God’s love for them? That was the test.

Where Eve failed to trust God, the Israelites also failed and they too disobeyed the commandments.

But it is just here that Jesus overcame. He lived by faith. Every temptation that Satan brought to Him in the wilderness was refuted by the simple reply, “It is written...”. Jesus lived in obedience to every word of God.

God’s Word was given in perfect love for man and Jesus obeyed it in faith. Thus He has become a Forerunner for us. If we are to serve God’s people effectively, it is essential that we too live by faith – and manifest our faith by total obedience to God’s commandments. Thus alone can we be examples to others.

Confidence in God’s Power

Faith is also a total confidence in God’s power. If Eve had felt the pull of temptation to be irresistible, she could have cried out for help from the Lord; and she would have received it. God’s power is sufficient to overcome the pull of every temptation.

Jesus cried out for this power, in the days of His flesh, and received it. That was why He never sinned.

We are told concerning Jesus that

“in the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to Him Who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear”.

We are also told that

“although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered”
(Hebrews 5:7, 8).

Now we are commanded to come with confidence to the throne of grace and to ask for grace to help us in our time of need.

“Let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace”, we are exhorted, “that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need”
(Hebrews 4:16).

God is looking for witnesses on earth – true witnesses to His perfect wisdom, love and power.

When Christians modify the commands of the New Testament they are testifying to their unbelief in God's wisdom. They imply thereby that God's omniscience was not sufficient to take into consideration the peculiar pressures of life in the 20th century!!

Jesus said,

“Whoever annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:19).

God tests our obedience and our faith through our attitude to the LESSER commands of His Word. The major commands, such as, “You shall not commit

murder or adultery etc.,” are kept by most Christians – and even by many non-Christians, for that matter. But whether we are going to be approved by God or not, is determined by our attitude to the lesser commands.

Jesus said,

“Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her”
(Mark 10:11).

The outright disobedience of this command and the lax, worldly attitude to divorce and remarriage in Christian circles nowadays (particularly in Western countries) is just one indication of Satan's success in getting many Christians to modify Jesus' commands to suit man's convenience and pleasure.

The Word of God says,

“Every woman who has her head uncovered while praying disgraces her head... If a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off”
(1 Corinthians 11:5, 6).

This is a small matter. But the disappearance of the 'head-covering' among women in many 'Westernised' churches is another indication of the lack of reverence for God's Word among today's Christians.

Even water-baptism, which Jesus and the apostles insisted on, is no longer preached in 'interdenominational' Christian circles, to avoid giving offense to anyone. Today's Christians do not mind displeasing God, so long as men are pleased!

“Has God really said...?” was Satan’s question to Eve. And it is the same question with which he introduces disobedience to God’s clear commands in Christendom today.

God tested Adam and Eve and they failed.
Today, you and I are being tested.

CHAPTER 4

The Testing of Job

The biographies of men of God and of those who failed God have been written in the Bible for our instruction and our warning. There is much that we can learn, if we meditate on them, with an ear attuned to the voice of the Spirit.

When reading of people in the Old Testament, one fact that we must bear in mind is that they all lived in a period prior to the coming of ‘grace’ through Jesus Christ.

*“For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ”
(John 1:17).*

Therefore, even God did not expect them to rise to New Testament standards.

Matthew 19:8, 9 gives us an illustration of this. There Jesus explained to the Pharisees why Moses permitted divorce under the old covenant. He said, “Because of your hardness of heart, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives”. But under the new covenant, God takes away our hard heart and gives us a soft heart instead. And so divorce is not permitted now.

God is called “the God Who tests the righteous” (*Jeremiah 20:12*).

He does not tempt any man to do evil.

“God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt any one” (*James 1:13*).

But He does TEST the righteous.

An Exemplary Man

Job was one of God's choice servants. God could point him out to Satan, as one man on earth who feared God in all his ways.

“The Lord said to Satan, ‘Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil’” (*Job 1:8*).

God says nothing about Job's intelligence or his talents or his wealth – for these have no value to God. He only points out his purity and his uprightness. As in the case of Jesus, it was Job's character and not his accomplishments or his ministry that delighted the heart of God.

Even Satan has supernatural gifts and intelligence. He has Bible-knowledge too!! What God looks for however, is character. When God tests us, He tests our character – not our knowledge of the Bible.

When God looks for a man whom He can boast in, whom He can point out to Satan, He looks for a man

of character – a blameless and an upright man, one who fears God and hates evil.

We may have a reputation among other believers for our spirituality. But can God, Who knows us through and through, point us out to Satan? Such a certificate as God gave Job is greater than any earthly honour that we can ever get. All the empty honour of Christendom too is as useless rubbish compared to that.

So the most important question is not “What opinion do others have of my spirituality?” but rather “Can God point me out to Satan as one Whom He can boast in?”

Satan's First Step

When God told Satan about Job, Satan said that Job was serving God because he had benefited and profited thereby.

“Satan answered the Lord, ‘Does Job fear God for nothing? Hast Thou not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But put forth Thy hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse Thee to Thy face’” (*Job 1:9–11*).

God refuted that charge and allowed Satan to test Job to find out for himself that his charge was not true. God did that because He knew Job's integrity.

How about us? Do we serve God for material profit? Would God have to acknowledge that Satan was right, if Satan pointed to any of us as one who served God for personal gain?

Alas, India is filled with Christian workers and pastors who are in Christian work for personal gain – some for a salary, some for honour and position, and some in order to get free trips to Western countries. Anyone who does Christian work for personal gain is serving Mammon and not God. True service for the Lord will always cost us something.

Consider the words of David, when he was about to offer a sacrifice to the Lord. He said,

“I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God which cost me nothing” (2 Samuel 24:24).

How few there are who have that spirit!

True service for the Lord will bring us material loss not gain. The profit will only be spiritual. That which brings material gain, on the other hand, belongs to Babylon and not to the heavenly Jerusalem.

The Bible says concerning spiritual Babylon, “The merchants of these things became rich from her” (*Revelation 18:15*).

In the midst of self-seeking Christian workers, Paul could point to a Timothy as a rare exception. He said concerning him,

“I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:19–21).

Paul was not deceived. He knew the spiritual condition of his co-workers. God isn't deceived concerning us either.

God had such confidence in Job that he could permit Satan to test him.

Even though Job lost all his children and his property in one day, yet he continued to worship and serve God. He said,

“Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:20–22).

He knew that all that he had – children and property and even health itself – were God's free gifts to him and that God had every right to take these away when He so desired. One cannot truly worship God until one has forsaken all – that is, given up the right to possess anything as one's own.

Satan's Second Step

God then allowed Satan to go one step further and to afflict Job with boils from head to foot.

Sickness is from Satan. But even that can be used by God to sanctify and perfect His servants.

Paul was afflicted by a thorn in the flesh, which he specifically says came from Satan. It was not a messenger of God but a messenger of Satan. Yet God allowed it to remain and would not remove it (despite Paul's repeated prayers), because it served the purpose of keeping Paul humble.

Paul says,

“Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me – to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness’” (2 Corinthians 12:7–9).

Satan's Third Step

Satan's third step was to afflict Job through his wife.

Then Job's wife said to him, “Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!” (*Job 2:9*).

It can be quite a test of your sanctification, when your own wife turns against you and accuses you.

The Word of God commands:

“Husbands, love your wives, and do not be embittered against them ... Love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her” (Colossians 3:19; Ephesians 5:25).

A husband must never be bitter against his wife under any circumstances, and he must love her at all times.

If you have a difficult wife, instead of complaining of your lot in life and envying others who have godly wives, you could look at your circumstances as a means to your own sanctification. God tests

you under those very circumstances to see if you qualify to get His certificate of approval. He tests you, when your wife shouts at you and taunts you, to see whether you qualify to be a true representative of Jesus Who was even called insane by His own relatives.

The gospel record says, “Jesus' own people ... went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, ‘He has lost His senses’” (*Mark 3:21*).

Jesus bore that insult with patience. We are called to follow Him and to represent Him.

Satan's Fourth Step

Satan's fourth step was to accuse Job through his preacher-friends (*Job chapters 4 to 25*).

This was the hardest blow for Job to bear – because those preachers came to him and acted like prophets of God telling him that all his sicknesses were due to his secret sins. Little did those preachers realise that they were unconsciously acting as agents for the ‘Accuser of the brethren’ (*Revelation 12:10*).

But God permitted them to do that in order to purify Job.

Overcoming Through Grace

Job lived in the pre-grace period and so could not live in constant triumph, as we can today.

Today God's promise is that

“sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace” (Romans 6:14).

But Job lived in an age when victory over sin was not possible. And so he finally fell a prey to self-pity, self-justification, depression and gloom. Occasionally his faith shone through the darkness. But his was an up-and-down experience.

Now that grace has come through Jesus Christ, if we are tested similarly, there is no need for even a moment of depression or gloom. The commands in the New Testament are

“Be anxious for nothing ... rejoice in the Lord always ... give thanks for everything...” etc.
(Philippians 4:6, 4).

Such commands were not given in the Old Testament, because grace had not yet come. But now we can see God's hand in everything and now grace is available at every moment to keep us victorious constantly.

Paul's triumphant cry was

“Thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph in Christ” (2 Corinthians 2:14).

We can be overcomers now, even if we lose our property and our children, or if our wives accuse us, or if fellow-believers misunderstand us and criticise us, or if anything else happens that God sees fit to send into our lives.

Thus God demonstrates to Satan that He has a remnant on earth, who will not only submit to all His dealings with them, but who will also accept every trial joyfully, convinced that these light afflictions

are designed by God to produce for them an eternal weight of glory.

The Bible says,

“For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen”
(2 Corinthians 4:17, 18).

A Testimony to Satan and His Hosts

The New Testament tells us that God desires to show His wisdom to the rulers and authorities in the heavenlies through the church.

Ephesians 3:10 says,

“In order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.”

Ephesians 6:12 tells us that those rulers are the evils spirits in the heavenly places.

The things that befall us are not accidental, but specifically planned for us and weighed out (so that they will never be beyond our capacity to bear) “according to the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God” (*Acts 2:23*) – with the dual aim of transforming us unto the likeness of Christ, and of manifesting to Satanic spirit-rulers in the heavenlies that God still has a people on earth who will love, obey and praise Him, in faith, in all circumstances.

Every trial that we go through is a trial of our faith. Even in Job's time, he could say,

"God knows every detail of what is happening to me" (Job 23:10 - TLB).

Today we can go one step further and say (on the basis of *Romans 8:28*) that

"God PLANS every detail concerning me."

Do we really believe, concerning everything that comes across our path, that God has planned it all in perfect wisdom and love, and that His power is almighty enough to deliver us from the testing, when the right time comes?

Will God find in you and me those whom He can boldly point out to Satan as men who will never complain or grumble under any circumstance, but who will only give thanks for all things at all times?

CHAPTER 5

The Testing of Abraham

A day came in Abraham's life, almost fifty years after God had first called him, when God Himself gave Abraham this certificate of approval, "Now I know that you are a fearer of God" (*Genesis 22:12*).

That was no cheap Bible college degree or honorary doctorate of divinity! Abraham would not have cared two paisas for such cheap papers as many of today's Christians hanker after. He wanted the real thing – God's certificate of approval on his life – and he got it.

It wasn't an easy road to that graduation day on Mount Moriah! But it was worth everything that Abraham had gone through to hear those words from God.

God doesn't give His certificates easily. He gave it to Abraham after fifty years of testing him.

In Jesus' case, we saw that the Father publicly proclaimed His pleasure in Him only after thirty years of testing Him in Nazareth.

The First Test

When Abraham was 75 years old, God had called him to leave his hometown and his relatives in Ur of

the Chaldees and to step out in faith in God, into the unknown. That was the first test that he passed. It is not easy to make a break with father, mother, brothers and sisters etc. But until that umbilical cord that ties us to them is broken we can never be disciples of Jesus!

Jesus said,

“If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:26).

Abraham obeyed God at once.

I have wondered what would have happened if Abraham had turned down God's call. God would certainly not have forced him. God would have found someone else; and we would never have heard of Abraham again. That someone else who responded to God would have become the father of faith and the ancestor of the Messiah! How much Abraham would have missed if he had failed in that first test! Little did he realise when he stepped out of Ur, turning his back on the pleadings of his relatives, what a glorious future God had planned for him.

God still calls people, as He called Abraham. Little do those who are being called realise what great issues hang in the balance when they have heard the call of God. Church history, throughout these 20 centuries, is filled with the amazing stories of men and women who responded to God's call immediately, joyfully and wholeheartedly like Abraham and who fulfilled God's purposes.

Eternity alone will reveal however, how many others were also called, who did not respond and who wasted their lives. The rich young ruler who turned away from Jesus to embrace his money a little tighter, was but one among many who were called, but who made the wrong choice when tested.

Those whom God calls usually find that their first and greatest hindrance comes from their unconverted and carnal relatives. That was why Jesus spoke of 'hating father and mother' as being the first condition of discipleship.

Abraham passed the test here – though not in one step. His father joined him on the journey out of Ur, but persuaded Abraham to stop at Haran (half-way to Canaan).

“Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to enter the land of Canaan; and they went as far as Haran, and settled there” (*Genesis 11:31*).

God, in mercy, took away Abraham's father in death, so that Abraham might not be hindered any longer. Then Abraham moved on to Canaan.

We must never let our love for our relatives hinder us from God's purpose for our lives.

More than four hundred years later, the sons of Levi had to take a similar stand against their relatives when the children of Israel worshipped the golden calf.

Moses came down from the mount at that time and called out, “Whoever is for the Lord, come to me” (*Exodus 32:26*). The sons of Levi came to him

immediately. They were ordered to go into the camp and slay the idolaters with the sword – and not to spare even their own relatives. The sons of Levi did this unhesitatingly.

Moses describing their action later, says,

“He (Levi) obeyed Your (God’s) instructions and destroyed many sinners, even his own children, brothers, fathers and mothers. (Therefore) the Levites shall teach God’s laws to Israel” (Deuteronomy 33:9, 10 - TLB).

Little did the Israelites realise that day, that God was testing them to see who could be His priests. The Levites qualified. And so God made them His priests. That was not partiality. God had tested all twelve tribes at that time. Only the tribe of Levi had passed the test.

The Second Test

Once Abraham had become free from his relatives, then God could test him in relation to material things. This too is a further requirement for discipleship.

Jesus said,

“Whoever does not forsake all his own possessions cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:33).

In *Genesis chapters 13 & 14*, we read of two incidents where Abraham was tested in relation to mammon. The first time was when he and Lot had to separate, because their flocks had become too large for them

to stay together. It would have been easy, and right too, for Abraham as the senior man and as the man whom God had called to Canaan, to take the first pick of the land. But with genuine unselfishness and large-heartedness, he told Lot to choose first. Lot chose what looked like the best to human eyes – the land of Sodom.

But neither Abraham nor Lot realised that God had been a silent witness to this transaction – as He is to all our financial transactions. God was so delighted with the unselfishness manifested by Abraham, that He immediately spoke to him and told him that his seed would inherit all the land that Abraham could see – in all four directions. This included the portion chosen by Lot as well.

“The Lord said to Abram after Lot had separated from him, ‘Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever’ (Genesis 13:14, 15).

Today, nearly 4000 years later, we find that God has kept His word. The descendants of Abraham (the Jews) are living in that land that God gave to Abraham. The descendants of Lot (some of the Arabs) however have lost what their forefather grabbed. Such are God’s ways. The meek will inherit the earth.

In *Genesis 14*, we find Abraham again behaving with the dignity becoming of a true servant of God, in the

matter of material things. Abraham had rescued the people and the property of the king of Sodom from his enemies. As a reward, the king of Sodom offered all the property to Abraham. But Abraham refused to take anything.

And Abram said to the king of Sodom,

“I have sworn to the Lord God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take a thread or a sandal thong or anything that is yours, lest you should say, ‘I have made Abram rich’”
(Genesis 14:22, 23).

In effect, what Abraham was saying was,

“Since my God is the Owner of heaven and earth, I don’t need anything from you.”

Again God was a silent listener to the conversation. He immediately appeared to Abraham and told him that He Himself would reward him.

“After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, ‘Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great’” (Genesis 15:1).

If we honour God, He will certainly honour us.

The children of Adam are masters at grabbing things from others – if not by force then at least when such things are offered freely. We don’t realise that God is testing us in our financial transactions and in our conversations about financial matters. Based on

how we conduct ourselves in such situations, God determines what place we can have in His kingdom and in His remnant army on earth.

The Third Test

Abraham had been tested in relation to his parents and in relation to material wealth. Now he had to be tested in relation to his son.

This was to be the final test before He got God’s certificate of approval.

When God spoke to Abraham that night to offer Isaac as a sacrifice, Abraham was 125 years old and had already obtained a name among the people as a man of God. *Genesis 21:22* tells us that “at that time (King) Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, spoke to Abraham, saying, ‘God is with you in all that you do.’”

But God cares nothing for the high opinions that other men have about us. God wanted to test Abraham Himself. And so He spoke to Abraham quietly that night; and no-one else heard what God had spoken to him. *Genesis 22:1* tells us:

“After these things (that is, after King Abimelech had given Abraham a certificate as a man of God), God tested Abraham, and said to him, ‘Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’”

It was a costly thing that God asked him for that night. Abraham could have gone about the next day, doing nothing about it, and no-one would have known that Abraham had disobeyed God. That was

how God was going to test whether Abraham feared Him or not.

And that is how God tests us too. He speaks to us secretly in our heart – so quietly that not even those living with us know what God has said to us. One reason why God has given each of us a totally private area – our thought-life – is to test us to see whether we fear Him or not.

If our thoughts sounded out loud like our words do, then we would all keep our thoughts pure, for we would not want anyone to think less of us. But when our thoughts are so secret that only God can see them, it is easy to find out whether we fear Him or not.

If we harbour impure and unloving thoughts that we would not want our fellow-believers to know about, it would clearly prove that we fear men but not God. That is unfortunately the condition of the vast majority of believers. God has tested them and they have failed the test.

How few there are like Joseph, who when tempted sexually in secret, said

“How can I do such a wicked thing as this? It would be a sin against God” (Genesis 39:9 - TLB).

Such young men are the ones who get God's certificate of approval.

Very, very few believers are totally faithful in the area of sexual purity in their thought-life. But it is through these few that God can demonstrate

to Satan that He still has some sons on earth who would rather pluck out their right eye than commit a sin with that eye and who would rather die than lust in their thoughts. The way to life is narrow and there are few who find it. But the wonderful thing is that there are a few!

Abraham passed the test. He did not seek just for a good testimony before men. He wanted to obey God even in the secret area. And so he took Isaac the very next morning and journeyed towards Mount Moriah and there he offered the darling of his heart to God, saying thereby,

“Lord, I love You more than anyone and anything on earth”.

It was then that God gave Abraham His certificate of approval and promised to bless him without measure:

“By Myself I have sworn,’ says the Lord, ‘because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, indeed I will greatly bless you ... and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. And in your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed because you have obeyed My voice” (Genesis 22:16–18).

Nothing delights God as much as sacrificial obedience.

To be ‘pure in heart’ is more than to have just a clean thought-life (*Matthew 5:8*). It is to have nothing in one's heart but God alone. Many who live clean and upright lives nevertheless have an idolatrous

attachment to their job or to the ministry that God has given them. They have not learnt to offer their God-given Isaacs on the altar back to God.

Do you want God plus some gift, or God plus some ministry, or God plus the good opinions of men, or perhaps God plus health? God plus some Isaac? Or is God alone sufficient for you?

No-one can be approved of God who does not pass the test here. Only when we come to the place where we can sincerely say to the Lord, "Lord, whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is no-one and nothing on earth that I desire beside Thee" (*Psalms 73:25*), do we qualify as far as God is concerned.

This is the Mount Moriah that each of us has to climb, where we offer everything that is dear to us on the altar to God and are left with God alone.

If our joy increases through an increment in our salary or through a promotion in our job, or through a gift that we receive, or if it decreases when we don't get the expected promotion or gift, that would clearly indicate that our joy is found in God plus something earthly. Then we certainly need to purify our joy until we learn to 'rejoice in the Lord' alone. If our joy is found in God alone, it will not increase with the addition of anything earthly nor will it decrease when something of this earth is lost.

Philippians 4:4 commands us to "rejoice in the Lord always".

The reason why most believers cannot rejoice ALWAYS is because their joy is not found in the Lord alone. It is in the Lord plus something else.

When our heart is pure – having place for the Lord alone – our joy will be pure too.

Step by step God had led Abraham on, to this place of total dedication – and now God was going to bless all the families of the earth through him. The rivers of blessing began to flow from Abraham's life when he came down from Mount Moriah.

God's purpose is that Abraham's blessing should be ours too.

Galatians 3:14 says,

"That in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

God desires that the rivers of living water (the blessing of the Spirit) should now flow through each of us.

But how many are willing to pay the price?

And how many qualify, when God tests them?

CHAPTER 6

The Testing of Moses

Moses was another man who got a certificate of approval from God, God said concerning him,

“My servant Moses is faithful in all My household”
(Numbers 12:7).

It was recorded of Moses at his death that, “since then no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face” (*Deuteronomy 34:10*).

The Dethroning of Human Wisdom

It was not through Moses’s first forty years of training in the palace and the military academies of Egypt that he became a spiritual leader. No. It was through God breaking the strength of his ‘Self’, when Moses spent the next forty years looking after sheep in the wilderness.

At the age of eighty, with his confidence in his own abilities shattered, Moses could lean upon God and become the deliverer of God’s people.

In the construction of the tabernacle in the wilderness, we read one phrase repeated eighteen times in *Exodus chapters 39 & 40* – the phrase, “just as

the Lord had commanded Moses". The pattern of the tabernacle given by the Lord was a very simple and modest-looking affair. It was a far cry from the fantastic pyramids that Moses had seen built in Egypt.

If Moses had been given the plan of the tabernacle at the age of 40, when the strength of his 'Self' was in full bloom, he would certainly have modified it and made it look more attractive. But at the age of 80, Self had so died out, that he did exactly as the Lord commanded him. And that is what brought the glory of the Lord into the tabernacle.

Our human wisdom has to be dethroned if we are to obtain Divine wisdom.

The Bible says,

"If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become foolish that he may become wise" (1 Corinthians 3:18).

God could approve of Moses only when the chaff of the wisdom of Egypt had been thrashed out of him.

The apostle Paul had studied for three years at the feet of Gamaliel, the great professor of theology at the Jerusalem Bible school. That's why he had to spend three years after his conversion, in the wilderness of Arabia to have the wisdom of Gamaliel removed from his system and replaced with Divine wisdom. Paul refers to this period in *Galatians 1:17, 18*: "I went away to Arabia... Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem."

Only then could Paul become a servant of the Lord.

The dethroning of human cleverness is fundamental for anyone who would serve the Lord. Yet there are few who learn this lesson fully.

God tested Moses when he made the tabernacle to see whether he would make it exactly according to the pattern that he had received on the mount. The glory of the Lord coming on that tabernacle was the visible indication of God's satisfaction with Moses' work.

How is it with us in what we do and build for the Lord? Is it exactly according to the pattern found in the Scriptures? Or have we modified it with some of the wisdom of this world? If so, then that must certainly be one reason why the glory of the Lord is not found in our lives.

Not Seeking One's Own

God tested Moses later in another area. Twice God tested him to see whether he would seek his own honour at the expense of the Israelites. In both cases Moses passed the test with flying colours.

The first occasion was when the children of Israel had rebelled against God through making the golden calf. God then told Moses,

"Now let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them, and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation" (Exodus 32:10).

The second occasion was when the Israelites refused to enter Canaan, God then told Moses

“I will smite them with pestilence and dispossess them, and I will make you into a nation greater and mightier than they” (Numbers 14:12).

On both occasions, God told Moses that He would destroy the Israelites and make Moses and his descendants into a great nation. Moses had the opportunity then to become the inheritor of the promises made to Abraham and to the twelve tribes of Israel.

Lesser men might have failed in that test, but not Moses. On both occasions, he pleaded with God to spare the Israelites. On one occasion, he even went so far as to be willing to die and to spend eternity in hell, if only Israel could be saved.

“Moses returned to the Lord, and said, ‘Alas, this people has committed a great sin, and they have made a god of gold for themselves. But now, if Thou wilt, forgive their sin – and if not, please blot me out from Thy book which Thou has written!’” (Exodus 32:31, 32).

Truly Moses had the spirit of Christ Himself – who was willing to be forsaken by the Father on the cross in order that we might be saved.

God was so delighted with Moses' unselfishness that thereafter He began to speak with Moses very intimately.

“The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend” (Exodus 33:11).

God even gave Moses the unspeakable privilege of seeing His glory.

When Moses prayed saying,

“I pray Thee, show me Thy glory!”,

the Lord said,

“Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand there on the rock; and it will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by. Then I will take My hand away and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen” (Exodus 33:18–23).

The most important qualification for a servant of God is that he does not seek his own.

Seeking our own gain or honour is so deeply rooted in all of us, that God has a difficult task to free us from it. He arranges our circumstances so that we can see our self-seeking spirit, so that we might judge ourselves and cleanse ourselves from it. He speaks to us through His Word and is constantly speaking to us through His Spirit (if we have ears to hear) urging us to cleanse ourselves from this self-seeking spirit.

And yet, in spite of all this, very few make the grade and qualify for God's certificate of approval. Moses was one such. Paul and Timothy were two others.

There are not many, but there are a few.

The great lack of a spirit of intercession for others, such as even Moses had under the old covenant, is

mainly due to this one fact, that almost everyone, at the bottom of his heart, seeks his own in some way or the other. We gain no honour when we pray for others secretly. That's why few believers ever do it.

Here is where we are tested by God – for He cannot commit Himself to those who seek their own.

Reaction to Criticism and Opposition

Another beautiful thing that we see in Moses is his reaction when criticised or opposed.

When the people were rebellious and said “Let us appoint another leader,” Moses just fell on his face and kept quiet.

We read that,

“Moses and Aaron fell on their faces in the presence of all the assembly of the congregation of the sons of Israel” (Numbers 14:5).

He refused to vindicate himself.

When Korah and about 250 other leaders of Israel rebelled against Moses' leadership, again we read that,

“when Moses heard this, he fell on his face”
(Numbers 16:4).

He would not defend himself, or hold on to his position, or assert his authority.

When his own sister and brother criticised him behind his back and God began to judge them for it, again Moses was on his face praying that God would show them mercy.

“Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, “Oh God, heal her, I pray!” (Numbers 12:13).

Truly he was the humblest man on earth during his lifetime. The Bible records that,

“Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth” (Numbers 12:3).

God can commit himself only to such men.

Power and authority over others have a way of corrupting people. There is a saying in the world that

“Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely!”

But absolute power did not corrupt Moses even slightly. God tested him again and again through the rebellion of his flock. Each time Moses passed the test.

Spiritual leadership has great dangers attached to it. But blessed are those who know how to fall on their face in the dust again and again, and how to hold their tongues and refrain from self-justification and self-assertion.

God's promise to His servants is that He Himself will vindicate them. He has said,

“No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper; and every tongue that accuses you in judgement you will condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their vindication is from Me” (Isaiah 54:17).

It is best therefore to leave such matters to God rather than to take them into our hands. Our only task is to commit our cause to Him Who judges righteously, as Jesus did.

“While being reviled, Jesus did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously” (1 Peter 2:23).

Three times in *Isaiah 53:7*, it is recorded that Jesus was silent – when afflicted, when sheared and when led to the slaughter.

“He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth. Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth” (Isaiah 53:7).

One who does not know how to keep silent on such occasions can never expect to be a spiritual leader.

The opposition that we face is one means by which God tests our faith, to see whether we can trust Him to take care of the situation or not.

The Mistakes of God's Servant

The biographies of the men of God in the Bible are an encouragement to us, because unlike modern biographies, they show us the weak sides of those men too. A man who never made a mistake in his life would be no encouragement to us who make so many mistakes.

But the mistakes of men of God in the Bible are recorded not only for our encouragement, but for our warning as well.

The standards that God demands from His anointed servants are far, far higher than what He demands from other believers. From those to whom much is given, much is also required.

God gave ten chances to the unbelieving Israelites, before denying them entry into Canaan. He said concerning them, “Surely all the men who have put Me to the test these ten times shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers” (*Numbers 14:22, 23*).

But He gave Moses only one chance. And when Moses acted in unbelief and disobedience just once – and that too in a very small way – God was quick to deny him entry into the promised land. The incident is recorded for our warning in *Numbers 20:7–12*:

“The Lord spoke to Moses saying, ‘Take the rod; and you and your brother Aaron assemble the congregation and speak to the rock before their eyes, that it may yield its water. You shall thus bring forth water for them out of the rock and let the congregation and their beasts drink.’ So Moses

took the rod from before the Lord, just as He had commanded him; and Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly before the rock. And he said to them, 'Listen now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?' Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation and their beasts drank. But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them'."

God had told Moses to speak to the rock this time, for the water to flow. The rock had already been smitten once, forty years earlier as we read in *Exodus 17:6*:

"The Lord said to Moses, 'Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink.' And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel."

That symbolised Christ being crucified once and once only. There was no need to strike the rock a second time.

But Moses lost his temper and struck the rock (*Numbers 20:10*). The water still came forth – despite the disobedience of God's servant. The fact that the water flowed only proved that God loved the people who were thirsty. It did not sanction the disobedience of God's servant.

This explains the reason why there is blessing even in the ministry of men and women who disobey God's commands in their personal lives.

But Moses could not get away with his disobedience, just because the water flowed. God punished him severely. And He will punish all disobedient servants of His one day.

For forty years Moses had looked forward to the day when he could enter Canaan; and now at the border of Canaan, he was disqualified. It is possible to preach to others, and yet to be disqualified oneself – even towards the end of one's life.

Paul recognised this and said,

"I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified" (1 Corinthians 9:27).

The Bible says,

"He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the sons of Israel" (Psalm 103:7).

The Israelites had only seen God's EXTERNAL ACTIONS, but Moses had the privilege of knowing God's WAYS. Therefore more was expected from Moses than from the other Israelites.

The privileges of God's servants are many but their accountability is correspondingly more.

Little did Moses realise at Meribah, that God was testing him. If he had known, he might have been more careful. Little do we realise that God is testing us too, weighing our actions and our motives, in the

situations of daily life. Even if people are blessed through our ministry, we will still have to answer for our personal lives one day at the judgment seat of Christ.

Once earlier in Moses' life, God had given him an indication of the strict demands that He made on His servants.

Soon after calling Moses to be Israel's deliverer, God almost took away his life for his disobedience in not circumcising his son. In deference to the wishes of Zipporah, his Gentile wife, Moses had not circumcised his son. But God would not tolerate any disobedience in Moses, at any cost.

The incident is recorded for our warning in *Exodus 4:24-26*:

“Now it came about at the lodging-place on the way that the Lord met him (Moses) and sought to put him to death. Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and threw it at Moses' feet, and she said, ‘You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me’. So He (the Lord) let him (Moses) alone.”

Even though Moses was, at that time, the most important person on earth for the fulfilment of God's purposes, that made no difference to God. He would take away even the life of a Moses, if He saw disobedience in him. There is no partiality with God.

Although God denied Moses the privilege of leading the Israelites into Canaan, yet, because he had been such a faithful servant of God all through, God graciously allowed him, 1500 years later, to enter the

promised land and to stand with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration, as we are told in *Matthew 17:2, 3*: “Jesus was transfigured before them (Peter, James and John) ... and behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.”

God is very long-suffering and compassionate and He is not unrighteous to forget anyone's sacrificial labours of love.

“God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints” (Hebrews 6:10).

But God is also very strict.

“Behold then the kindness and the severity of God” (Romans 11:22).

To offer to God a service that is acceptable to Him, we must walk with godly fear.

“Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:28, 29).

Like Timothy we too must be diligent to be workmen “approved by God” (*2 Timothy 2:15*).

CHAPTER 7

The Testing of David

God testified concerning David saying,

“I have found David, a man after My own heart, who will do all my will” (Acts 13:22).

Saul had been God’s first choice as king of Israel. But Saul failed in both the tests that God gave him – through impatience (*1 Samuel 13*) and disobedience (*1 Samuel 15*). And so God took away the kingdom from him and gave it to David.

But it was a long and arduous road that David trod from the time that he was anointed as king, to the time that he actually sat on the throne of Israel. During all those years he was tested by God in numerous ways – and he qualified.

Faithfulness at Home and at Work

The first thing we notice about David is that God called him when he was faithfully doing his earthly duties at home and in his place of work – as a shepherd-boy.

“And Samuel said to Jesse (when he came to anoint one of Jesse’s sons as king of Israel, at God’s

command), 'Are these all the children?' And he said, There remains yet the youngest (David), and behold, he is tending the sheep" (1 Samuel 16:11).

Faithfulness at home and in our place of work is fundamental if God is to approve of our lives.

We considered this matter when we looked at how Jesus obtained God's approval. But it is worth repeating, for it is so important.

Jesus never called an unemployed person to the ministry of the Word. Every apostle whose calling for the ministry is described in the gospels, was called from his place of work.

The tragedy of Christian work in India today is that the vast majority of those in full-time Christian work are people who have never had a secular job at any time. This one fact alone makes it questionable whether God ever called them to His service. God places great importance on faithfulness in the ordinary tasks of our earthly life. That is what qualifies us for His service.

A Concern for God's Name

The second thing we see about David is his concern for the glory of God's Name. When Goliath was defying the armies of Israel, it was not some cheap desire for adventure that drove David to challenge the giant – but a concern for the honour of God's Name.

We read that

"David spoke to the men who were standing by him, saying, 'What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine, and takes away the reproach

from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should taunt the armies of the living God?" (1 Samuel 17:26).

The primary mark of every true servant of God is that uppermost in his thinking is a concern for the glory of God's Name. "Hallowed be Thy Name" is his first and spontaneous request in prayer (*Matthew 6:9*).

Everything else – personal comfort and security – is secondary. This is the point at which God tests all of us, in various circumstances. Few pass the test. David was one who did.

The concern for the honour of God's Name was so intense in David, that a strong faith came into his heart that God would certainly help him to overcome Goliath. This faith drove away all his fear. Armed with that faith he went forth and slew the giant and drove away the enemies of Israel.

If we were as concerned about the glory of God's Name as David was, we would also find that faith in God drives away all fear from our hearts and that Goliaths are slain. It is often because our concern for the glory of God is so little, that we remain in timidity instead of going forth boldly in faith.

Refusal to Take Revenge

David's testings were not over with the slaying of Goliath. They had only begun. Saul's jealousy at David's popularity, made him hound David all over Israel in order to kill him. David ran from one town to another and from one cave to another.

On two occasions when Saul was alone, he was at David's mercy and David could easily have killed him. In fact David's friends told him to do so. But David refused. He would not touch God's anointed king – even if the king were a backslider. David did not want to grab the throne from Saul. He believed that God was well able to put him on the throne in His own good time.

David's faith in the sovereignty of God is a far more wonderful thing to behold than his faith in God's ability to help him slay Goliath.

David was being tested by God when Saul lay at his mercy – not just once, but twice. The first occasion is recorded in *1 Samuel 24:3–7*:

“Saul came to the sheepfolds on the way, where there was a cave; and he went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were sitting in the inner recesses of the cave. And the men of David said to him, ‘Behold, this is the day of which the Lord said to you, “Behold; I am about to give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it seems good to you”.’ Then David arose and cut off the edge of Saul’s robe secretly. And it came about afterward that David’s conscience bothered him because he had cut off the edge of Saul’s robe. So he said to his men, ‘Far be it from me because of the Lord that I should do this thing to my lord, the Lord’s anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, since he is the Lord’s anointed.’ And David persuaded his men with these words and did not allow them to rise up against Saul. And Saul arose, left the cave, and went on his way.”

The second occasion is recorded in *1 Samuel 26:6–12*:

“David and Abishai came to the people by night, and behold, Saul lay sleeping inside the circle of the camp, with his spear stuck in the ground at his head; and Abner and the people were lying around him. Then Abishai said to David, ‘Today God has delivered your enemy into your hand; now therefore, please let me strike him with the spear to the ground with one stroke, and I will not strike him the second time.’ But David said to Abishai, ‘Do not destroy him, for who can stretch out his hand against the Lord’s anointed and be without guilt?’ David also said, ‘As the Lord lives, surely the Lord will strike him, or his day will come that he dies, or he will go down into battle and perish. The Lord forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the Lord’s anointed; but now please take the spear that is at his head and the jug of water; and let us go.’ So David took the spear and the jug of water from beside Saul’s head, and they went away, but no one saw or knew it, nor did any awake, for they were all asleep, because a sound sleep from the Lord had fallen on them.”

Each time David passed the test. He would not take revenge – for he knew that vengeance belonged to the Lord alone. He was determined to overcome evil with good.

The Bible says,

Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written,

'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'
'But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he
is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you
will heap burning coals upon his head. "Do not
be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good"
 (Romans 12:19–21).

Faith in God's Sovereignty

God had promised David the throne. And David was willing to wait for God to give it to him.

It is quite a test of our faith and our patience when we have to wait for that which God has already promised to give us.

David never lost anything by waiting and trusting in God. God had planned for David to become king as soon as he completed his thirtieth birthday; and circumstances worked out exactly as God had planned.

"David was thirty years old when he became king" (2 Samuel 5:4).

David had learnt no doubt from the biography of Joseph that God was well able to put a man on the throne at His appointed time.

The word of the Lord had tested Joseph also many years earlier in very trying circumstances.

"They afflicted Joseph's feet with fetters; he
was laid in irons. Until the time that God's word
came to pass, the word of the Lord tested him"
 (Psalms 105:18, 19).

But as soon as Joseph had completed his thirtieth birthday, God's time came and Joseph became the second ruler in Egypt.

"Now Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh, king of Egypt" (Genesis 41:46).

Neither the jealousy of his brothers nor the false accusation of Potiphar's wife could prevent God's plan for Joseph's life from being fulfilled. In fact they could not delay the accomplishment of God's will by even a single day.

David had read that story and now he was determined to prove God's faithfulness and sovereignty in his own life. And he found that what God did for Joseph, he would do for him too.

The question now is whether we have faith that what God did for Joseph and David and a host of others, He will do for us too. Here is where our faith is tested.

Do you believe, for example, that the marriage-partner whom God has planned for you will come to you, without your having to grab or to act carnally? And likewise, that the job and the house that God has planned for you – and all the other things that you need for life on earth – will come to you at God's appointed time? It is when we are faced with such needs that our faith is tested.

"Those who wait for the Lord (to work on their
behalf) will never be ashamed" (Isaiah 49:23).

"For since the world began no-one has seen or
heard of such a God as ours Who works for those
who wait for Him" (Isaiah 64:4 - TLB).

Men of faith always get the best – without grabbing.

How different it was with Jacob who deceived his father in order to get the birthright! If only Jacob had committed the matter to God and trusted Him, he could have got the birthright without having to tell lies (*Genesis 27*). But because Jacob got it the wrong way, he had to run away from his home and suffer much for the next twenty years.

All these incidents are recorded in Scripture for our instruction and our warning, so that we may not act in unbelief and impatience at any time.

When tempted to tell a lie in the office in order to escape out a tight spot, we can refuse the temptation and honour God and trust Him to take care of us. You can never lose out by telling the truth and honouring God. After all, God is certainly more powerful than any lie. And if a lie can deliver you, how much more God can!!

“Promotion does not come from the east or the west (that is, by chance), (nor from any man), but God is the Judge Who puts down one and exalts another” (Psalms 75:6, 7).

It is God alone who can exalt an unknown Joseph and an unknown David to an important ministry, after having tested them and found them faithful.

Through Trials to Abundance

Recounting his experience later, David says,

“You have tested me O God; You have refined me as silver is refined. You brought me into a net;

You laid an oppressive burden on my back. You allowed men to be placed over me and to ride over my head. I had to pass through fire and water. But through it all you finally brought me to a place of liberty and overflowing abundance” (Psalms 66:10–12 - various translations).

That is how David's cup began to overflow and run over. (In *Psalms 23:5*, David uses the same Hebrew word for 'running over' that he uses in *Psalms 66:12* for 'place of abundance').

God's ultimate purpose is to bring us to a place of glorious freedom where the rivers of living water flow out from us continuously. But He cannot lead us there without testing us first.

He will take us through fire and water. He will allow men to abuse us and to take advantage of us. He will put us into the net – confining our movement and our ministry. In all these situations, He will watch our reactions. If we bow in humble and joyful acceptance of all that He has ordered for our lives, He will certainly bring us finally to the place of overflowing abundance.

Honest Acknowledgement of Sin

One final aspect of David's character that we could consider, is his willingness to judge himself, even after becoming king. When he fell into sin with Bathsheba, he did not immediately realise the seriousness of his sin. Later, when Nathan the prophet came and charged him with his sin, we find David humbly acknowledging his fault.

"I have sinned against the Lord.", he acknowledged to Nathan (*2 Samuel 12:13*).

We are not to compare ourselves with David, who fell into adultery, for he lived under the old covenant. He was not under grace. The standard that God expects of us today is far higher.

The standard that Jesus has laid down for us in this area now is described in *Matthew 5:28, 29*:

"I say to you, that every one who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell."

But we can learn a profitable lesson from David's reaction to conviction of sin.

Why was it that God took away the kingdom from Saul for what, humanly speaking, was a negligible offense? And how did God allow David to continue as king, when his crime – adultery followed by murder – was far greater? The answer lies in the reaction of these two men when confronted with their sin. Saul acknowledged his sin privately to Samuel, but sought honour before the people.

"Then Saul said (to Samuel), 'I have sinned; but please honour me now before the elders of my people and before Israel'" (*1 Samuel 15:30*).

He had sinned but he still wanted the honour of men. David, on the other hand, did not try to cover

up his sin, but publicly acknowledged it by writing *Psalms 51*.

What we learn from these two men is that those who seek the honour of men find it far more difficult to turn to God in genuine brokenness and repentance than those who have committed murder or adultery. Jesus forgave both the murderer on the cross as well as the woman caught in adultery, because they repented. But the Pharisees who continued to seek the honour of men found it difficult to repent. And so they could not be forgiven.

Seeking man's honour is a form of idolatry. And it is in this area that the Lord tests each of us the most.

Blessed are those who pass the test, like David.

Our past failures need not hinder us from fulfilling God's purposes, if we are willing to acknowledge them in humility – for God gives His grace to the humble.

CHAPTER 8

The Testing of Elisha and Gehazi

At a critical time in the history of Israel, God raised up the prophet Elijah to be His witness to the nation. Elijah had a servant called Elisha whom God selected as the next prophet to the nation.

Elisha had a servant called Gehazi.

It is an interesting study to see the contrast between Elisha and Gehazi.

Elisha's Faithfulness

God anointed Elisha with a double portion of the anointing that Elijah had. This was God's seal of approval on Elisha's life. But before God anointed him thus, he had been tested.

As in the case of all true servants of God, Elisha too was called to the ministry, while he was faithfully doing his secular duties.

"Elijah found Elisha the son of Shaphat, while he was plowing with twelve pairs of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth. And Elijah passed over to him and threw his mantle on him" (*1 Kings 19:19*).

Thereafter, Elisha spent many years doing menial jobs for the prophet Elijah. He was known as the

one “who used to pour water on the hands of Elijah” (2 Kings 3:11b).

He did not seek great things for himself, but God had great plans for that young man.

Before Elijah went up to heaven, Elisha had to be tested. And so Elijah told Elisha to stay on in Gilgal, while he himself went on to Bethel. Elisha refused to stay back but was determined to go with Elijah. At Bethel, Elijah again tried to shake off Elisha by saying that he had to go to Jericho. But Elisha stuck on like a leech. Finally, at Jericho, Elisha was tested once more in a similar way. Again, Elisha passed the test of persistence and accompanied Elijah to Jordan. It was thus that he got the double portion of the anointing – God’s best for his life (2 Kings 2:1–14).

What is the message here for us? There are various stages in our spiritual development at which God tests us to see whether we are satisfied with what we have already received or whether we will press on to God’s highest.

Gilgal stands for the place where our sins are forgiven.

“The Lord said to Joshua, ‘Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.’ So the name of that place is called Gilgal to this day” (Joshua 5:8, 9).

Many Christians get thus far and stop there.

Some press on till Bethel (meaning ‘the house of God’) – which stands for fellowship with believers in the family of God.

“And Jacob called the name of that place Bethel. Then Jacob said, ‘This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God’s house” (Genesis 28:19, 22).

Some stop here.

But a few go still further to Jericho – which stands for the manifestation of the supernatural power of God.

“The people shouted with a great shout and the wall fell down flat ... and they took the city (of Jericho)” (Joshua 6:20).

This is as far as most Christians ever go.

Very, very few go all the way to Jordan – which stands for identification with Christ in His death, as symbolised in baptism.

“Then Jesus arrived at the Jordan, coming to John, to be baptized by him” (Matthew 3:13).

Very, very few are willing to walk the way of the cross–

“the new and living way that Jesus has inaugurated for us through His flesh” (Hebrews 10:20).

But it is these few, who are wholehearted enough to press on to total death to Self, who receive the double portion – God’s best.

All of us are being tested today, as to what stage we will stop at.

Gehazi's Unfaithfulness

Even as Elisha had succeeded Elijah as the prophet, Gehazi could perhaps have succeeded Elisha as the next prophet, if he had been faithful. But Gehazi had to be tested first.

This testing took place when Naaman, the Syrian general returned to Elisha after being healed of his leprosy. Out of gratitude for his healing, Naaman offered Elisha silver and gold worth nearly a million rupees and ten fancy Syrian suits of clothing. What a temptation for a lesser man than Elisha! But Elisha turned down the offer without a moment's hesitation. Naaman was an unbeliever and a compromiser and Elisha would receive nothing from him.

The fact that Naaman was a compromiser is clearly seen in what he said to Elisha after he had been healed. He said that he was compelled to worship idols, because of his official position. Naaman knew that idolatry was wrong. But he was unwilling to sacrifice his job for the sake of the truth, just like many today.

Naaman told Elisha,

"In this matter may the Lord pardon your servant: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leans on my hand and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, when I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon your servant in this matter" (See 2 Kings 5:18).

Elisha would not receive anything from such a man.

The early apostles followed the same pattern.

"They went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles" (3 John 7).

Gehazi had observed Elisha's attitude towards Naaman's money. But he felt that Elisha had been foolish to refuse what Naaman had offered so freely. He ran after Naaman therefore (just like many Indians today run after Western Christians), told a few lies and collected forty thousand rupees worth of silver and two of those Syrian suits.

Elisha who could see through a crooked man easily, immediately exposed Gehazi's covetousness. He told Gehazi that since he had grabbed Naaman's money, he would get Naaman's leprosy as well.

He told him,

"Therefore, the leprosy of Naaman shall cleave to you and to your descendants forever.' So Gehazi went out from his presence a leper as white as snow" (2 Kings 5:27).

Instead of getting a double portion of Elisha's anointing, Gehazi got leprosy instead.

Little did Gehazi realise that he was being tested by God that day. If only he had known what tremendous issues were at stake, he might have been more careful.

But as we have seen repeatedly, we don't usually realise when God is testing us – particularly in the area of mammon.

There is a word written concerning King Hezekiah that at one time

“God left him alone to test him so that he might know what was in his heart” (2 Chronicles 32:31).

This was true of Gehazi too. God allowed him to be in a situation where no-one was watching him. Only thus could he be tested.

The End-Result of Covetousness

It was the same with Achan in Jericho, many years earlier. God allowed Achan to be alone in a house with no-one watching him, in order to test him to see whether he would take what God had forbidden or not. Achan failed.

Achan describes his fall thus: “I saw ... I coveted ... I took ... I hid ...” (*Joshua 7:21*).

The same sequence was repeated in Gehazi's case.

Achan and his family thereby missed their inheritance in Canaan; and Gehazi thereby missed the calling that God had in mind for him.

Both Achan and Gehazi followed in the footsteps of Esau who “sold his own birthright for a single meal” (*Hebrews 12:16*).

The contrast between Elisha and Gehazi is striking. While Elisha pursued after Elijah for a double portion of the anointing, Gehazi pursued after Naaman for a little bit of wealth. They are both representative of two types of Christian workers today – and each of us know which category we fall into!!

Gehazi would no doubt have been familiar with the story of Balaam. Yet he never thought that Balaam's end would be his too. Balaam was a prophet on whom the Spirit of God had rested at one time.

We read that at one stage “Balaam lifted up his eyes and saw Israel camping tribe by tribe, and the Spirit of God came upon him” (*Numbers 24:2*).

He went astray, not because he was unrighteous in money matters, but because he loved money. The love of money and the love of honour from an earthly king so blinded Balaam that he could not even see that he was going against the will of God. God tested Balaam to see what was in his heart.

When Balaam sought God's will at first, as to whether he should go with king Balak's messengers to meet the king, God had given him a clear answer: “Do not go with them” (*Numbers 22:12*). The answer could not have been clearer.

But when Balak offered more money and greater honour, Balaam was tempted to ask for permission again. When God saw that Balaam really wanted to go, He told him to go. But Balaam suffered the consequences.

God may at times grant our request, even though it is not His will, just because He sees that we desire that thing so greatly. But the spiritual result will be just as it is written concerning the Israelites in *Psalm 106:15* (KJV):

“He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul”.

Little did Balaam realise that he had been tested and that his love for money had led him astray. He continued to prophesy, but he had taken the first step downward on the slippery slope of seeking earthly gain and it was just a matter of time before

he reached the bottom. He who had once known such intimate communion with God ended up as a sorcerer and was slain by the Israelites.

The record says, "The sons of Israel killed Balaam the diviner" (*Joshua 13:22*).

Gehazi failed to take such a warning for himself.

But what shall we say of multitudes of Christians today who have the examples of both Balaam and Gehazi to warn them and who have still gone astray.

The love of money is a root of all sorts of evil. God has allowed material things to attract us in order to test our faithfulness and our devotion to Him.

Jesus never intended that any of His disciples should get material things by pursuing after them. We are called to seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness first. All the material things that we need will then come falling into our lap, as and when we need them.

God never intended that any of His children should accumulate material goods beyond their needs. Neither has He intended that any of us should chase after wealth. If we trust God He will give us what He sees is best for us – and then we won't be ruined by money.

When the Lord blesses us, all that we need will be provided, and there won't be any sorrow that comes along with it.

"It is the blessing of the Lord that makes rich, and He adds no sorrow to it" (*Proverbs 10:22*).

"My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus"
(*Philippians 4:19*).

However, the wealth that we acquire by chasing after it will come to us along with many sorrows as well.

Paul warns Timothy about this danger saying,

"Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. Some by longing for money have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows" (*1 Timothy 6:10*).

We cannot serve both God and Mammon (material things). We have "to love one and hate the other and hold on to one and despise the other" (*Luke 16:13*).

He who has ears to hear let him hear.

CHAPTER 9

The Testing of Peter and Judas

Among the twelve apostles that Jesus chose, perhaps the greatest contrast in personality was between Peter and Judas Iscariot. Peter was simple, unlearned and warm-hearted. Judas Iscariot was intelligent, shrewd and ambitious.

Peter's Attitude to Money

God had a great calling for Simon Peter. But it could not be fulfilled until he had been tested and approved.

Peter however had no idea about God's wonderful plan, at the time that Jesus called him. God unfolds His plan to us only one step at a time.

One day Jesus came into Peter's boat and told him to put out the boat into deep water and to let down his nets for a catch. Peter did so and caught the greatest catch of his lifetime (*Luke 5:1-11*).

If Peter had been like some Christian businessmen today, he would have said something like this to Jesus,

“Lord, this is fantastic. Let us – you and I – be partners. You do the preaching and I will support you financially. If my fishing business is going to

be like this, I will soon be the richest businessman in all Israel; and my tithes will support not only you but a host of other Christian workers in many parts of this land and abroad as well!"

Peter could then have gone around the world giving his testimony at various conferences for businessmen and taught businessmen about a Christ who could make their businesses prosper.

Such is the reasoning of the carnal mind.

But Peter didn't do that. When Jesus called him to leave his nets, He left his fishing business immediately and followed Jesus. He passed the test.

Little do Christians realise when God prospers their ways so that they earn more money that they are being tested. Most Christians fail the test here. They settle for being empty millionaires when they could perhaps have become apostles.

Years later, Peter, far from being a wealthy businessman, could only say, "I do not possess silver and gold" (*Acts 3:6*). But he had something far better than silver and gold. He had given up the rubbish of earthly wealth for the eternal wealth of Christ's kingdom.

Christian bookshops are flooded these days with books that claim to teach Christians how to become materially prosperous and to make money, with Jesus as a partner in one's life! Christians are encouraged in these books to claim expensive cars, and houses and lands – all by faith in Christ.

Even though a child can see the earthly-mindedness of these writers, yet many believers

are being deceived. The testimonies given therein of people receiving material things may all be true – but how many of them realised that God was testing them when he gave them wealth? They were being tested when they became rich to see whether they would learn to give away their wealth and become 'rich towards God' (*Luke 12:21*). But they all failed the test – unlike Peter.

Self is the centre of every child of Adam. When we are converted, Self does not die, but seeks in subtle ways to make God also to serve its own interests. This is the source of the carnal Christianity that majors on getting material and physical blessings from God and that comes to us nowadays in these books, clothed in the garb of 'faith'.

Yet these books serve a purpose too, in that they reveal what the hearts of their readers truly desire – the earthly or the heavenly. Thus the wheat is sifted from the chaff in Christendom!

Peter's Attitude to Correction

We see how Jesus tested Peter in yet another way when He rebuked Peter publicly with the sharpest rebuke that He ever gave any human being.

When Jesus told His disciples that He was going to be rejected and crucified, Peter, with intense human love for the Lord

"took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You'" (*Matthew 16:22*).

Jesus turned around and publicly said to Peter (in the hearing of the other apostles),

“Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to Me” (Matthew 16:23).

It is quite insulting to our ego to be rebuked publicly. It is far worse to be called ‘Satan’.

Yet Peter never got offended.

When many of Jesus’ disciples got offended with the message of death to Self that Jesus preached, and left Him, Jesus asked the twelve apostles whether they would like to go away too. It was Peter then who replied saying,

“Lord, to whom shall we go. You have words of eternal life” (John 6:68).

These words were uttered by Peter soon after he had received that strong rebuke from Jesus’ lips. That is what makes Peter’s words even more wonderful. He felt that any words of rebuke from Jesus’ lips were only words of eternal life!

Our ability to accept rebuke from an older brother is a test of our humility.

Peter passed the test with flying colours.

Judas’ Attitude to Money

Judas Iscariot being one of the twelve apostles whom Jesus selected, had just as good a chance as the others to qualify for the certificate “Approved by God”.

But like the others he too had to be tested.

The gospel record says that “Judas Iscariot became a traitor” (*Luke 6:16*). This implies that he was just as sincere as the other eleven disciples when Jesus chose him. But he backslid terribly through selfish ambition.

The Bible warns us,

“Where selfish ambition exists, there is disorder and every evil thing” (James 3:16).

Judas’ life is a warning to all of us, for it is possible for anyone of us to become like him, if we are not careful.

He was the treasurer of Jesus’ team and he had ample opportunity to prove his faithfulness in the area of mammon. He could have become one of the authors of the New Testament epistles, if he had been faithful. His name would certainly have been on one of the foundation stones of the wall of the New Jerusalem.

The Bible says that

“the wall of the city (New Jerusalem) had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (Revelation 21:14).

But Judas Iscariot failed when tested.

One of the uses of the money-bag was to have funds to give to the poor and the needy (as we can see from *John 13:29*): “For some were supposing, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus was saying to him, that he should give something to the poor.”

Judas professed to have an interest in this activity but he stole all the money that was donated for the poor.

It is written that “Judas Iscariot ... was not concerned about the poor, but he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it” (*John 12:4–6*).

We could ask the question, “Why didn’t Jesus expose Judas straight-away?”

To answer that question, we could ask another question, “Why doesn’t Jesus expose all those who are making money for themselves in the name of Christianity today?” There are thousands who serve God for money even today, and who are not 100% honest with the money that is given to them for God’s work.

But the Lord is patient. He gives time for everyone to be tested.

If only Judas could have known what he was going to miss by choosing money, how differently he might have acted! And if only today’s Christian workers knew what they are missing by choosing money, how differently they would act in relation to money!!

Judas’ problem was that he loved to receive but hated to give.

Jesus had taught His disciples the blessedness of giving.

“The Lord Jesus Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (*Acts 20:35*).

Peter understood that. But not Judas. Judas thought that happiness came through receiving more and more.

Every Christian falls into one of these two categories: Those like Peter, who forsake all and who love to give to God and to others in need; and those, like Judas, who love to receive and to hoard up for themselves. If ever these Judases give, it will be in a miserly way, just to ease their conscience – and that too with great reluctance! They have no reluctance however, when it comes to receiving!!

God tests us in the matter of receiving and giving to see whether we desire to live by the principles of the world or of His kingdom.

If we are to be approved by God, we will have to radically crucify the love to receive gifts that is found in our flesh. We will have to unlearn old habits and learn new ones instead. As much as we have been experts at receiving gifts in the past, we can now become experts at giving.

But we can’t hope to become experts at anything overnight. It is only constant practice that can make us experts at anything. We have to begin to give and then continue at it until our character has been truly transformed, so that finally God Himself can testify concerning us that we would rather give than receive.

The true disciple of Jesus is one who has learnt how to be rich towards God and how to give to others who are in need. In his own time of need, he will find that God gives back to him in the same measure that he gave out.

Jesus told His disciples,

“Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, they will pour into your lap. For whatever measure you deal out to others, it will be dealt to you in return” (Luke 6:38).

Jesus taught that if we were unfaithful with earthly things we could never hope to receive spiritual riches from God. He said,

“If you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous mammon, who will entrust the true riches to you?” (Luke 16:11).

The Lord put Judas Iscariot on probation with the money-bag and he failed. His loss was eternal.

Today you and I are on probation with our money-bag.

Judas' Attitude to Correction

We saw that Peter was tested by Jesus in his reaction to being corrected publicly. Judas was tested in this area too. But unlike Peter, he failed.

When a woman poured an alabaster vial of perfume at Jesus' feet, out of gratitude for what the Lord had done for her, Judas expressed his opinion that it was a waste of money. Jesus however, took the side of the woman and said,

“Let her alone, in order that she may keep it for the day of My burial. For the poor you have always with you; but you do not always have Me” (John 13:7, 8).

One can hardly say that Jesus rebuked Judas Iscariot at all here. In fact, compared to the way Jesus rebuked Peter, this was nothing!

Yet Judas Iscariot was offended.

In the parallel passage in Matthew's gospel, we read about what Judas did immediately after this event:

“THEN Judas Iscariot went to the chief priests and said, ‘What are you willing to give me to deliver Him up to you?’” (Matthew 26:14, 15).

The word ‘Then’ is significant here. The immediate provocation that prompted Judas to go to the priests and to offer to betray Jesus to them was his being corrected by the Lord.

Peter passed the test triumphantly. But Judas failed miserably.

Today you and I are tested whenever we are corrected by those whom God has placed in authority over us.

Children are tested when they are corrected by their parents. Wives are tested when they are corrected by their husbands. Employees are tested when they are corrected by their employers. And in the church, we are all tested when we are corrected by our elders.

Our reaction to correction is one of the clearest tests of our humility. If we get offended we are in company with Judas Iscariot.

If we find that we do get offended when corrected, we need to cry out to God for help that we might die to our ego, so that we don't miss out on our eternal reward.

Eternal issues hung on Peter's and Judas' reactions to correction. Little did they realise that they were under probation.

Little do many of us realise that God is watching our reaction to correction as well.

You cannot be approved by God if you are unwilling to be corrected or if you get offended when corrected.

CHAPTER 10

The Company of God's Approved Ones

In *Revelation 14:1-5*, we read of a small company of disciples who followed the Lord wholeheartedly in their earthly lives. They stand with Jesus in the final day, as overcomers – for God was able to accomplish His full purpose in their lives.

Those whose sins are forgiven are a vast multitude whom no man can number, as we see in *Revelation 7:9, 10*:

“After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.””

But the company of disciples mentioned in *Revelation 14* is a much smaller one, that can be numbered – 144,000. Whether the number is literal or symbolic (as much of the book of Revelation is) is immaterial. The point is that it is a very small number when compared with the great multitude.

This is the remnant that was true and faithful to God on earth. They were tested and obtained God's certificate of approval. God Himself certifies concerning them that

“they have kept themselves pure ... they follow the Lamb wherever He goes ... no lie (or guile) was found in their mouth ... they are blameless”
(verses 4, 5).

These are God's first fruits. They comprise the bride of Christ. On the day of the marriage of the Lamb, it will become clear to everyone that it was worth it all be utterly true and faithful to God in all things – both big and small.

In that day, the cry in heaven is,

“Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready”
(Revelation 19:7).

Those who sought their own gain and honour on earth, will realise fully only in that day how great their loss really is. Those who loved father or mother, wife or children, or brothers or sisters or their own life, or material things, above the Lord, will discover their eternal loss in that day.

Then it will become evident that the wisest people on earth were those who obeyed the commands of Jesus totally and who sought with all their hearts to walk even as He walked. The empty honour of Christendom will then be seen clearly for the rubbish

that it is. Money and material things we will then see, were only the means by which God tested us to see whether we qualified to be in the Bride of Christ.

Oh that our eyes might be opened even now to see something of the realities that we shall see clearly in that day!

The greatest honour that any human being can have is to find a place in the Bride of Christ in that day – as one who has been tested and approved by God Himself!

He who has ears to hear, let him hear. Amen.

About the Book

Christendom is filled today with believers who are seeking for God's material blessings. Very few seek for God's approval over the way they live. But when we stand before the Lord in the final day, we will discover that the wisest people on earth were those who sought to gain God's approval, more than His blessing.

The empty honour of Christendom will then be seen clearly for the rubbish that it is. Money and material things we will then see, were only the means by which God tested us to see whether we qualified to be a part of His eternal kingdom. Those who loved anyone or anything on earth more than the Lord Jesus, will discover their *eternal* loss in that day.

The greatest honour that any human being can have is to hear the Lord Jesus say to him in that day. *"Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Lord."*

Now is the time when God is testing us. If you want your eyes to be opened to see something of the realities that you will see clearly in that final day, read this book with a hungry heart...



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