

WHY GO TO CHURCH?

A Bible-based rationale for
church attendance

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THE NAME AND THE PLACE

Exodus 20:24 An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee .

There are particular places where God *records* his name. He has decreed that his blessings will only be poured out when his people are assembled in such places. Though God is omnipotent, his holiness necessitates this observance. He has ordained certain places to rendezvous with his people, and only when this condition is fulfilled, will he come and bless us. It is incumbent, then, on the shepherd of Christ's flock to ensure that the sheep are led to the auspicious place where the Lord puts his name. The Hebrew word for record is *zakar* which means *to remember, recall or call to mind*. In other words, there is a place where the name of the

Lord Jesus will be remembered, recalled and called to mind.

When the Lord calls out a minister, his first task, after sanctifying himself and being ordained, is to seek the Lord diligently for the place where the name of Jesus is recorded. He must understand the gravity of this task. The Church is no place for trifling; it is a place associated with the memory of Christ; it is his house. Jacob was a minister of God; he carried the weight of the promises of Abraham and the nascent nation of Israel in his loins. When he was buffeted by confusion, weakness and ungodliness, God spoke clearly:

Genesis 35:1 *And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother*

Genesis 31:13 *I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto me: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred.*

So why did God order Jacob to go to Bethel? The biblical record seems to indicate that it was a place where God had recorded his name. I for one am glad that in this world, where every iota of space appears to have been spiritually polluted by a myriad of evils: murder, cursing, hatred, wars, sexual sins and other abominations, God has places where he records his name. These are pockets of spiritual oxygen; spaces of holiness and peace. The Church is intended to be such a place – a prime estate set aside for the Almighty to rendezvous with his beloved flock. Will we allow the Lord to have such a space? Will we accord to him the honor, glory and majesty that are rightfully his in such a place?

Genesis 28:12 *And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.*

Genesis 28:13 *And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed.*

The Church is the house of Jesus Christ. It is sanctified by his blood and Spirit. In such a place, there is no hindrance of divine ministry. This is what the angels ascending and descending signifies. This place, where he records his name, is qualitatively different from other places. It doesn't matter what spiritual state you may be in. Jacob was distressed, lonely and tired. The divine hand guided him to Bethel – the place where God could minister to him unhindered. You may even be asleep, but as long as you come to Bethel, there is hope. The minister must discern the profound importance of the link between the name and the place. Note the concern of the Lord to relocate his people from Egypt to Israel.

***Exodus 8:1** And the LORD spake unto Moses, Go unto Pharaoh, and say unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Let my people go, that they may serve me.*

***Deut 11:10** For the land, whither thou goest in to possess it, is not as the land of Egypt, from whence ye came out, where thou sowedst thy seed,*

and wateredst it with thy foot, as a garden of herbs:

Deut 11:11 *But the land, whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven:*

Deut 11:12 *A land which the LORD thy God careth for: the eyes of the LORD thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year.*

Note that the story of Israel was one of going from one place to another – from Egypt to Canaan land. In Egypt, God protected them from Pharaoh's anger and judged him, but his blessings, peace and prosperity were reserved for Canaan, not Egypt. It is in the Church where you will grow in faith and multiply in the grace of the Lord, for it is in his house that the Lord prepares the five-fold ministry for the perfection of the saints.

Eph 4:11 *And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;*

Eph 4:12 *For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:*

***Eph 4:13** Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:*

In 2002, Bishop Solomon Goddeti, the presider of the Church in India, shared a story with me which underscored the link between the name and the place. He encountered a particularly powerful case of demon possession in which the malevolent entity declared that he would not leave because the young boy was in his territory. This part of Mumbai was called Dombivli, a stronghold of spiritual wickedness in high places. The Bishop decided to take the young man to his house where, after a few days of fasting and prayer, the entity capitulated and left. I am reminded of the place called the Gadarenes (Mark 5:1). This was a stronghold of the enemy, but Jesus was undaunted and de-territorialized the demons that held sway there. Despite this, the people of the area would not let him stay there. They asked him to leave. What a

pity! What a blessing would have been theirs if they allowed him to settle there, teach and associate his name with that place!

My objective in this message is to sensitize us once again to the great link between the place and the name. God wants to first dwell among his people in the place where he puts his name. Secondly, he wants his people to come regularly to this place where he can teach, comfort, empower, transform and prepare his people for eternity. Our attitude and actions with respect to the house of God will determine your success in life. It is not a coincidence that the house of Obedom was blessed when the Ark entered his house while, in contrast, the children of Israel continually lacked when they ignored the Temple.

2Sam 6:12 *And it was told king David, saying, The LORD hath blessed the house of Obedom, and all that pertaineth unto him, because of the ark of God. So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obedom into the city of David with gladness.*

Hag 1:6 *Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink,*

but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.

Hag 1:7 *Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways.*

Hag 1:8 *Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD.*

You may say that you love the name of Jesus. That is marvelous! But have you understood that the Lord Jesus linked his name to a place – the gathering together of his people?

Matthew 18:20 *For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*

The assembling of his people *is* the place where he chose to place his name, and it is when the link is made between the name and the place that the ladder of Jacob is placed between the two, and unhindered ministry can begin. Minister of God, be diligent in teaching the people about the utmost importance attached to the name and

place. The gathering of the people in the place where the name of Jesus is established is top of God's agenda. May you and I be found engaged tirelessly in this business until he returns!

THE PROPHET AND THE TEMPLE

***Heb 3:2** Who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house.*

***Heb 3:5** And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after;*

Before God builds his Tabernacle or Temple in the midst of his people, he first prepares a prophet. Moses was such a man. We recall from the pages of the Bible that he was called in a supernatural manner at the burning bush in Midian. Such a powerful, ‘God-moment’ is intended to forever imprint the memory of the call in the prophet. In all the years when he was rejected by his own people, who were on the verge of stoning him many times, and the 40 years of wandering in the merciless desert, the ‘God-moment’ sustained him. This lesson has always obtained: every church congregation

(Tabernacle) must have a ‘prophet’ who is supernaturally called and enabled.

Act 13:22 And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will.

Why is such a prophet-figure an essential part of the project of God? Since the dawn of civilization, when Cain killed Abel, no two individuals have demonstrated the same love, dedication and faithfulness to God. When God made humans, he also breathed ‘whosoever wills’ into their very nature. Within this ‘whosoever wills’, we find every gradation of love, indifference and even, sadly, hate, towards the Creator. In his omniscience God knows every heart. He will never entrust the affairs of his house to someone who is untrustworthy. There may even be some who start very well, but with time, they may turn against him. No wonder the Bible portrays God as someone who is

continually on the lookout for the right candidate:

2Ch 16:9 For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. Herein thou hast done foolishly: therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars.

Max Weber (1864-1920), one of the founding fathers of sociology, gave us the concept of 'ideal-types'. Let us take a King as an example. Simply put, an ideal type is what the perfect or ideal King should be like. He stated that there are three 'ideal typologies': traditional, legal and charismatic. These are ways in which authority in society has been legitimized. Elders ruling in places like African villages are examples of traditional authority. The second type, the legal ideal, can be seen in modern efficient bureaucracies. The third ideal, however, the charismatic, is of relevance to this study. A quote by one author explains it best:

By contrast, the third of the types – charismatic domination – is the most dynamic, and it holds special importance in the sphere of religion. It is on clear display in the prophets and sages of world history, though it applies as well to warriors or to statesmen. In such cases, leadership is acquired through a single characteristic: the compelling personal magnetism of one or a few individuals...When such a figure appears in a society, he or she can, on the sheer strength of a claim to power, wisdom, or divinity, win a following and alter the course of civilization. Charisma is the most compelling agent of change in society and history. ¹

Obviously, Weber did not understand the power of the Holy Spirit which anointed the apostles, but his observation is nevertheless valid. What he called charisma, a term which in Greek means ‘favor freely given’, is indeed ‘the most compelling agent of change in society and history’. I mentioned Moses earlier. Another charismatic man is Solomon – a man who was

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Pals, Daniel L. *Eight Theories of Religion*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2006. pp. 156-157.

unique and endowed with supernatural wisdom so much so that the Queen of Sheba came from the ends of the earth to hear him. Is it any wonder that Solomon was associated with the greatest house that God ever owned on earth? But, tragically, what happened to Solomon? He forgot that his wisdom and charisma were supernaturally given to serve God and draw attention to God rather than Solomon's own glory. The lesson we learn from Solomon is once again what I stressed earlier: God is looking for a man whose heart is perfect towards him.

What happens, then, when the prophet fails to fulfill his obligations to the house of God? The Lord sends prophets of reform. One such example was Samuel:

***1Sam 3:19** And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground.*

***1Sam 3:20** And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the LORD.*

When the original prophet passes away, his energy and vision slowly fades away. There is often a period of jostling for power and backsliding. This was the case by the time Samuel appeared on the scene. Gone was the towering figure of Moses, the miracles of manna and water from the rock. Gone were the lightning and thunder, the holiness and righteousness. The reform prophet reminds them of the original pact, prophet and vision. Was it not in the time of Eli, before Samuel appeared that we hear the word ‘Ichabod’?

1Sa 4:21 *And she named the child Ichabod, saying, The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father in law and her husband.*

1Sa 4:22 *And she said, The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken.*

A reform prophet often appears difficult to understand. His character may not be endearing. He is often portrayed as aloof and ‘bad-tempered’. Think about Elijah! It follows that

their mission of restoration was a thankless one. It also appears as if they had no friends at all. This is because they carried the shame and sorrow of their nation on their shoulders. They wore clothes of sackcloth and ashes as if God put the shame of Israel visibly on them. Samuel restored truth and righteousness. He was fearless and uncompromising. The author I mentioned earlier states:

The center of his [the prophet's] life is his mission: He has been specially called by either the voice of God or a vision of Truth to proclaim a life-altering message. He would find it absurd to be paid for his labors. His calling sustains him, and he is content if need be to live in poverty, accepting only what people voluntarily give him to subsist.²

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Pals, Daniel L. *Eight Theories of Religion*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 167.

Sadly, if the people still frustrate and reject him, God ultimately destroys the Temple, as it happened in 587 B.C.

***Ezek 22:30** And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none.*

So what transfer value is there in the lesson of the prophet called for the Temple? Much. God calls a shepherd, prepares him in the encounter and sends him out to gather sheep. He is enabled and empowered with charisma. When the shepherd dies, sometimes there is a period of chaos before the Lord finds the reform prophet who restores and reminds of the original pact. That is why we call ourselves the ‘Apostolic Church’. We wish to restore Christians to the message and way of the apostles. Let us pray that Jesus will always find a man with a prophetic calling, one who has had an encounter, is empowered with charisma and fears none. Let us pray even more fervently that the Lord will not

conclude that he must allow his house, the church, to be destroyed. The Temple must have a prophet. The church must have an anointed shepherd.

THE ONLY VENUE WHERE SINS WERE ATONED FOR

Exodus 20:24 *An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.*

Exodus 20:25 *And if thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it.*

Exodus 20:26 *Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto mine altar, that thy nakedness be not discovered thereon.*

The Tabernacle and the Temple were supposed to be qualitatively different from all other places on the face of the earth. The Temple/Church is supposed to be a place where we are reminded of our sins. Every individual who was burdened by guilt was first met by the powerful stench of blood even before entering the Temple. It was consecrated to be a place where the knowledge and awareness of sin was to

be indelibly imprinted on the one who desired fellowship with God. Way before the pilgrim entered the holy premises of the Temple, he was greeted by the terrible sound of animals bleating and bellowing. These animals would be wide-eyed with horror; they were everywhere in the courtyard struggling between Levites who held them tightly. Obviously, this was not a pleasant sound, but it served to remind the believer about the serious consequences of sin. The whole scenario had the most profound effect on the visitor.

***Deut 16:16** Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles: and they shall not appear before the LORD empty:*

Not only was there the smell of blood and the deafening sound of animals, there was the sight of blood itself; lots of blood. There was blood spurting out of the neck of the hundreds

of animals being slaughtered, blood flowing in small rivulets from the altar, blood staining the clothes of the Levites and blood generally staining much of the area surrounding the altar. Three times a year, all the males were commanded to come to Jerusalem and witness this sight. The Church, also, cannot ignore the command to come to the gathering of the saints and meditate on the blood-stained Cross of our Lord, Jesus Christ, he who died for the sins of the whole world.

Hebrews 10:25 *Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.*

Hebrews 10:26 *For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins,*

Note that the verse 26 links sin and sacrifice to verse 25 and ‘the assembling of ourselves together’. In other words, a failure to assemble ourselves together at the place the Lord

appointed for us leads to a situation where ‘there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins’. ‘Out of sight out of mind’ is a well attested experience: if we don’t take time out to smell and see the blood, we will gradually become conditioned towards sin and lose fear of the Lord. The Cross is not a pretty picture to meditate on, but it will deposit in you a powerful consciousness of the ugliness and consequences of sin, and, above all, nurture in us the fear of the Lord.

Proverbs 10:27 *The fear of the LORD
prolongeth days: but the years of the wicked shall
be shortened.*

Proverbs 14:26 *In the fear of the LORD is
strong confidence: and his children shall have a
place of refuge.*

Proverbs 15:16 *Better is little with the fear of
the LORD than great treasure and trouble
therewith.*

Proverbs 19:23 *The fear of the LORD
tendeth to life: and he that hath it shall abide
satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil.*

Was it not when the Apostles were gathered together that Jesus appeared with incontrovertible proofs of his suffering and death

on the Cross? The assembling together of the saints is an invitation to the Lord to come and show us his nail-pierced hands, spear-wounded side and thorn-bruised head. He told them ‘peace upon you’. The peace that we now enjoy was purchased through his nail-pierced hands and side. Those who seek Christ must come together because there can be much to distract us in the comfort and familiarity of our homes. Note in Exodus 20:24 that an altar of stone was to be uncut. This is to avoid the temptation of fashioning the stone into the image of a familiar object – a face or some creature of pagan making. If we worship our way alone, we risk going back to idolatry. We risk bowing down to what we have fashioned in our own image rather than what God has fashioned in his own image – Jesus Christ.

***Colossians 1:13** Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:*

Colossians 1:14 *In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:*

Colossians 1:15 *Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature*

To repent in the comfort of one's own home was fine, but there was no smell or sight of blood, no screams of animals and the sight of holy, dedicated Levites to bring home with full force the gravity of sin. The Levites were men of God dedicated and consecrated to serve him from the time they were born, basically. Such was Christ's respect for them that he commanded the lepers who were healed to show themselves to no man except the priest (Luke 5:14). Every Levite child was told by his mother and father that he was destined to serve God in the Temple. They were to receive the animals from the repentant, pray for them, worship and sing the praises of God while the people heard and generally stand as a reminder that God reigns in Zion. When you come to the House of God, the Church of the

living Christ, Jesus has ordained that there be ministers who pray for you, teach you the Word of God, lead you in worship and counsel you in all righteousness and holiness.

***Eph 4:11** And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;*

***Eph 4:12** For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:*

***Eph 4:13** Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:*

***Eph 4:14** That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;*

Brothers and Sisters, it is my prayer that we receive a new revelation concerning the importance of coming to the House of God, the gathering of the saints. Samuel, Anna and Simeon were not priests, but they gave themselves wholly to the Temple. They lived with the smell, the blood, the Levites, the prayers, the incense and

the worship. The reward of Anna and Simeon was to see the God of Israel appear in flesh. The prayers of the great people of David were to always dwell permanently in the Temple.

***Psalm 84:10** For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.*

***Psalm 27:4** One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple.*

Did you know the Apostles first met and fellowshiped in the Temple in Jerusalem (Acts 3:1; Peter and John went to pray in the Temple)? Come to the House of God, it was the only place where sins were atoned for in the Old Testament. And today, under the new Covenant, let the prayer of David be ours also – to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of our lives.

HOUSE OF PRAYER

***Matthew 21:13** And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.*

Every house is designed with some purpose in mind. A stadium, a hotel, a school and a hospital, to name a few, bring specific associations to mind. If one sees a person going into a hospital, one automatically assumes that either she is sick or that she will visit a sick person or that she works with the sick. Similarly, it is written that the house of God shall be called a house of prayer. Its purpose is communication with God. Any activity that goes on in there must come under the category of prayer. Any individual going into the house of God must enter in order to pray. If the question were to be

asked: ‘What is the house of God?’ The answer must unequivocally be: ‘The house of prayer’.

Note that Jesus says, ‘*The* house of prayer’ and not ‘a house of prayer’. It is one of a kind; God rules out any other houses of prayer. The Temple was the house of prayer par excellence.

Exodus 30:1 *And thou shalt make an altar to burn incense upon: of shittim wood shalt thou make it.*

Exodus 30:8 *And when Aaron lighteth the lamps at even, he shall burn incense upon it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations.*

The Scriptures above serve to remind us of the centrality of the act of prayer in the Temple. The altar of incense symbolized prayer. Just as the sweet-smelling incense rose upwards continually, Jesus expects the incense of prayer to rise upwards when we gather in his house. The incense was to burn perpetually before the Lord. In addition, we ought to observe that the item of furniture was called an altar. An altar represents a person who is dead to himself and alive only to

God. Cornelius was such an altar who fasted and prayed often to God.

***Act 10:2** A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.*

***Act 10:4** And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.*

Someone may say that we do not need to come to the house of God to pray. Our houses or any other location may serve the same purpose. I will first remind you that the children of Israel were commanded to come to the Temple thrice a year, but I am convinced there are several compelling reasons for going regularly to the house of God – the church. Consider our houses. We may have prayer meetings on and off but they are designed for daily living and not exclusively for the work of God. The telephone rings, sometimes the TV is blaring, children shout, scream and cry, and neighbors and visitors ring the doorbell, to name a few distractions. The

challenge posed by domestic concerns is encapsulated in Martha.

Luke 10:40 *But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me.*

Luke 10:41 *And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things:*

Luke 10:42 *But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.*

The above makes it plain that the Lord is looking for our undivided attention. For Martha, the right thing for a good Jewish woman like Mary to do was to serve in the kitchen. For Jesus it was communicating with him – listening to him - which mattered above all other concerns. I have preached in homes where I never saw several of the women at all during the message. They suddenly re-appeared with food at the end of the message. Thank God for the Temple! Thank God for his church! Everyone is called to honor his house by making it a house of prayer. The

Temple that Solomon built was just another Temple until Solomon fell on his royal knees and prayed that great prayer recorded in Scripture.

1Kings 8:27 *But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?*

1Kings 8:28 *Yet have thou respect unto the prayer of thy servant, and to his supplication, O LORD my God, to hearken unto the cry and to the prayer, which thy servant prayeth before thee to day:*

1Kings 8:29 *That thine eyes may be open toward this house night and day, even toward the place of which thou hast said, My name shall be there: that thou mayest hearken unto the prayer which thy servant shall make toward this place.*

1Kings 8:30 *And hearken thou to the supplication of thy servant, and of thy people Israel, when they shall pray toward this place: and bear thou in heaven thy dwelling place: and when thou hearest, forgive.*

Our God is a jealous God. He is jealous for his holiness, his righteousness and his salvation. He reserves certain places for himself always on this earth – a Sinai, a Jerusalem, to name two examples, just as he reserves and calls out certain

individuals for himself. Should it be strange then that he should have a house reserved for prayer and worship alone? Let me return to the earlier example about a domestic house. Can you honestly say that you do not gossip there? That you do not watch ungodly movies there? And will we still claim to make it a house of prayer? There was a cartoon I once saw in a newspaper. An Aborigine couple dressed in western clothing was watching TV in their hut. All of a sudden the man looks out of the window and sees two men coming. He quickly jumps up, shouts 'anthropologists', and they both hide the TV and put on their Aboriginal costumes to look authentic.

There is another important purpose of regularly going to the house of God. The longer I am in the presence of Jesus in his house, the more my flesh is exercised in holiness and self-discipline. If all I do is pray and pray and pray, clearly, with time, my psyche and mannerisms

undergo a change. Consider Moses. He was in the very presence of God for forty days and nights.

Exodus 34:28 *And he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments.*

Exodus 34:29 *And it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him.*

It doesn't take forty days and nights to write Ten Commandments. It takes a few minutes. But what was crucial was time spent in the presence of the Almighty so we might be transformed. On that mountain Moses had no one to gossip with; no TV to distract him; no food and even water – God suspended his biological functions. Now contrast this scene with that in the Temple where they were buying and selling animals and wares. It must have looked similar to the New York Stock

Exchange, without the phones and computers. Yelling, shouting, bargaining and money changing hands. I pity the person who went there to pray. It was anything but the house of prayer. I am certain if there was even one person praying he would have thanked Jesus for chasing the vulture capitalists out of the Temple. Please let us not make the house of God the house of business or profit. Just a house of prayer and communication with Jesus! There must be incense wafting up towards heaven. Isn't it beautiful that Gabriel stood at the right hand of the incense of the altar of prayer in the Temple? The mighty angel stood on the right side of the prayers of Zachariah. His prayers became a source of power.

***Luke 1:10** And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense.*

***Luke 1:11** And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense.*

May your prayers in the Temple of the Lord – the church – become the place of your power!

HOUSE OF WORSHIP

Revelation 4:11 *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.*

Ecc 7:29 *Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.*

The original purpose for the creation of humankind was and is still worship. We were made with worship in mind. Conversely, God as God is the receiver of this worship; and he is worthy of every iota of it. We were made for his pleasure say the voices of the grateful creatures in heaven. This means that we enjoy God in worship and he takes pleasure in us through our worship of him. Have you seen a dog that behaves like a frog – leaping and croaking like a frog? Or a bird that thinks it's a cat – stalking birds and meowing? Every creature behaves in accordance with the purpose for which it was

made, except man. Man who alone was given the privilege to understand, appreciate and love his Maker, appears to be busy with everything else except worship God. They have indeed sought them out many inventions, as Solomon said. How many people will be shocked to be told on the Day of Judgment that they wasted their lives on activities for which they were not made, like the dog which behaved like a frog.

***1Ch 23:3** Now the Levites were numbered from the age of thirty years and upward: and their number by their polls, man by man, was thirty and eight thousand.*

***1Ch 23:4** Of which, twenty and four thousand were to set forward the work of the house of the LORD; and six thousand were officers and judges:*

***1Ch 23:5** Moreover four thousand were porters; and four thousand praised the LORD with the instruments which I made, said David, to praise therewith.*

***2Sa 6:14** And David danced before the LORD with all his might; and David was girded with a linen ephod.*

There is a need to understand the connection between order, the House of God

and worship. In the beginning there was worship. The mighty angels and powerful beings of varying majesty and appearance worshipped God honoring his order. Lucifer, sadly, violated this order by desiring worship for himself. "Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because thou hast set thine heart as the heart of God' (Ezekiel 28:6). David understood fully well the devastation that pride brings. He witnessed firsthand the rise and fall of Saul. Now David determined to restore the order of God in the House of God through worship. The Levites were ordered to take up worship formation in the Temple. 4000 were elected for this purpose alone. David was not going to sit passively and watch them from a kingly distance. He was not going to be a Lucifer or a Saul. He made instruments of worship and gave them to the Levites. He put on the linen garments of the Levites and danced and leaped and worshipped with them. He was of the tribe of Judah, not Levi, and so he reckoned that if he

could not be a Levite by blood, he could become one through the order of worship. We are all invited to become Levites in worship. This is, after all, your original purpose. Through Jesus Christ all Christians have become Levites.

***Rev 1:5** And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,*

***Rev 1:6** And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*

The Temple was the center of worship in Israel. When there was order in worship, Israel was strong – a force to be reckoned with. When Israel had no Tabernacle or Temple, and hence no order of worship, they were weak and made the laughing stock of their enemies. In Egypt there was no Temple; neither was there one during the Babylonian exile when they said:

***Psalms 137:1, 2:** By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we*

*remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon
the willows in the midst thereof.*

Thankfully they had their harps with them which is why God was not finished with them. Were these the same instruments that David made for worship? The mistake that great singers like Sam Cooke, Elvis Presley and Whitney Houston, to name a few, committed was to continue using their voices, which they once used for the glory of Jesus, to sing worldly songs. Brother and Sister, God forbid that you leave the House of God, but such a fate should befall you, I plead with you to hang your harp upon the willow in Babylon. But let us not dwell on such pessimism; when Israel was at its most formidable, it was because there was the order of worship in the Temple.

2Ch 5:13 *It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD; and when they lifted up their voice with*

the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of musick, and praised the LORD, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever: that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the LORD;

2Ch 5:14 *So that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of God.*

Solomon's reign began with tremendous worship in the Temple. Such was the fervor and intensity that God could not just stand and watch from a distance – he came down with such glory that they had to vacate the building. Our goal in worship is to engage in it in such a manner that God comes down and takes over completely. This means that all our problems are now his. Pity the unclean spirits that decide to come and visit. Worship is war – in this is fulfilled God's statement to Jehoshaphat:

2Ch 20:15 *And he said, Hearken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the LORD unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason*

of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's.

2Ch 20:21 *And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the LORD, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the LORD; for his mercy endureth for ever.*

2Ch 20:22 *And when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten.*

Note that singers and worshippers went before the army. Worship is war. The Temple order of worship was now transplanted to the battlefield and the consequences were devastating for the enemy. Let us pledge and pray that we will do our utmost to maintain and promote the order of worship in the House of God the Church. Had there been no order of worshippers, Judah would have been slaughtered. If we close the Church, or weaken in our resolve to offer robust worship to Jesus, the enemy will devastate our

homes and lives. Come, let us make this House a House of worship; let us determine to maintain the order of worship so the glory of Jesus will descend and he will take over our battles. Let us engage in our original purpose – worship of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.

***Heb 1:6** And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him.*

***Act 24:14** But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets:*

HOUSE OF TEACHING

Matthew 26:55 *In that same hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me*

Above all things, the house of God is a house of teaching. It appears that Jesus taught daily in the Temple as the Scripture above states. So when God was manifest in the flesh, the one place that he was found daily was in the Temple teaching Israel. Whosoever was concerned for his or her soul found their way to the Temple. What I appreciate about our Lord, however, is that he also made time to preach in the open spaces on hills and the shore of Galilee, among others, so he could reach out to the women who had no access to the Temple premises. Nevertheless, I will focus on his teaching in the Temple because the subject is the house of God.

John 6:45 *It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man*

*therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of
the Father, cometh unto me.*

How many people I wonder realized who he was and availed themselves of the opportunity to be taught by God himself? There were many great teachers in the Bible: Moses, Samuel, Ezra and Paul, to name a few, but I would have given anything to be taught by God himself. All the others were teaching about the Word, but, now, however, the Word declared himself. The Word created our souls and, certainly, the soul recognized its source in the voice of him who taught in the Temple. No wonder John leaped in the womb; the people were astonished and the tree withered when Jesus cursed it for none can be untouched when the Word declares itself:

Matthew 7:28 *And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine:*

Matthew 7:29 *For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.*

Note that the Greek for “authority” (*exousia*) among others means the power to command and to do as one pleases. Jesus may have looked like a “tender plant and a root out of dry ground” as Isaiah said, but make no mistake, his voice revealed his identity. The moment Peter spoke, his voice revealed his geographical and cultural identity. His accent and body gesture said “Galilee”. Jesus may have looked like a servant, but his voice said “the God of heaven”, the “Word made flesh”.

*1Co 15:47 The first man is of the earth,
earthly: the second man is the Lord from heaven.*

The point, however, is that this privilege of being taught by God was made available in the Temple. This Bible studies series is about the significance of the Temple and attending the House of God. Topics such as prayer, worship, humility and giving are covered. All these involve teaching. Indeed, even before the Tabernacle was built, God dedicated almost two books – Exodus

and Numbers to teaching Moses and Israel about the nature, aim and details of the Temple.

***Exodus 24:12** And the LORD said unto Moses, Come up to me into the mount, and be there: and I will give thee tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written; that thou mayest teach them*

The question arises: what did God come in flesh to teach? What was so important that he came himself to teach in his own Temple? Everyone in the world has a right to know what their creator has taught. I don't know whether you and I will need knowledge of mathematics in eternity, but I do know for certain that all knowledge of planet earth – its place in the solar system, the laws of nature such as gravity, climate change etc. will be useless, for the Bible declares that he will destroy this earth with unquenchable fire and create a new heaven and

***2Peter 3:10** But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth*

*also and the works that are therein shall be
burned up. earth.*

Jesus was teaching knowledge that is eternal. Whenever you see teachers, lecturers and professors teaching, know that much (not all) that they are saying is useful for this earth. Their words come with an expiry date and some of them are speaking of things that are already expired. But Jesus uttered words that have no expiry date. Let us attempt at a brief but adequate explanation for salvation.

Let us divide Jesus' teaching into two parts: one is the knowledge of humans and the other is the knowledge of God. Let me begin first with the latter. In the eyes of God, humans are sinners. 'Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law' (1 John 3:4). Indeed, without knowledge of the Word of God, we could not know that we are transgressing against his law. Hence the importance of teaching. Now, the reward for sin

is death (Rom 6:23), which means the shedding of blood (Heb 9:22), for the life is in the blood (Lev 17:11). Salvation, now, is found only in him who has eternal life, God. Unless he makes provision through his own life, his blood, we are doomed. The Scripture states: 'I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes' (Hosea 13:14).

Now, the above means two things for anyone who is serious about his or her soul. Firstly, God's teaching about the human state should fill us with dread and consternation. Anyone who is still calm hasn't understood what God is saying. The next response should be: I need to look for the salvation of God which he promised to make available for me (Hosea 13:14). That salvation, the Scripture prophesied, would come in the form a man. 'And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it

together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it' (Isaiah 40:5).

***Isaiah 53:5** But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.*

***Isaiah 53:6** All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

It follows from the above that this salvation can only be effective if we believe that this man is the one and only God there is. He cannot be part of a so-called Trinity because that would mean there are other Gods with power and salvation (Matt 28:18). Every time the Bible mentions a number in connection to God, it says 'one' (Deut 6:4; Mal 2:10; Mark 12:32; Rom 3:30; Eph 4:6; I Tim 2:5; James 2:19). Furthermore, this one God, Jesus, commands us to be baptized in his name for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; Rom 6:3; Gal 3:27). Finally, because he came to make a new man not only in body but in spirit

also, (Eph 2:15; 4:24; Col 3:10), he commands us to seek and be filled with the Holy Spirit, which is not a third member of Trinity, but Jesus' Spirit himself (Gal 4:6; John 14:18; Phil 1:19). This is the teaching for which God came into the world and taught in his Temple.

HOUSE OF ORDER

Exodus 25:9 *According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it.*

Hebrews 8:5 *Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.*

A pattern is defined by the Cambridge Dictionary as a particular way in which something is done, is organized, or happens. Those who desire to approach God and make themselves familiar with his ways must understand that he is a God of order. So adamant and meticulous was God with respect to his order that he separated and instructed Moses for 40 days and nights on Mount Sinai. God knew that Israel would rebel

and worship Baal below the mountain once the awe-inspiring Moses no longer was visible; and yet he went ahead and took Moses away. What was so important that he was willing to risk apostasy? It was his order.

In fact, the same Moses, of whom the Bible says, ‘And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after’ (Hebrews 3:5), experienced firsthand the dangers of taking the order of God lightly.

***Exo 4:24** And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the LORD met him, and sought to kill him.*

***Exo 4:25** Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me.*

***Exo 4:26** So he let him go: then she said, A bloody husband thou art, because of the circumcision.*

***Exo 4:27** And the LORD said to Aaron, Go into the wilderness to meet Moses. And he went, and met him in the mount of God, and kissed him.*

Note that God suspended all communication with Moses until his children were circumcised. Circumcision represents baptism in Jesus name. It is only reasonable that one who is to lead the people of God should first implement the commands of God.

It is perhaps appropriate to begin the study of God's order with the word *pattern* and the phrase *shadow of the heavenly things*. Every King has his court and conducts his order in a particular manner. King Ahasuerus had a law in his court: anyone who approached his throne without the King holding out a golden scepter was to be killed instantly (Esther 4:11). Perhaps this was a severe warning to would-be-assassins of which there were plenty in those days. Had King Uzziah understood this principle well, he would not have encroached into the throne room of God and died.

2Ch 26:18 *And they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the LORD, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense: go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed; neither shall it be for thine honour from the LORD God.*

To know the order of God is to know when the golden scepter is stretched out. Heaven is the abode of God; it is his headquarters. It is the original pattern, if you will.

Isaiah 66:1 *Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest?*

Heaven is a place of perfect order and submission to the will of God. When there was rebellion in heaven, God dealt with it swiftly. Jesus asked us to pray, 'Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven' (Matthew 6:10) for only when the order of God reigns in the family, the church and society, will great blessings flow.

Act 2:42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Act 2:43 And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.

Act 2:44 And all that believed were together, and had all things common;

Act 2:45 And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

Act 2:46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,

Act 2:47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

So what then is the apostle's doctrine which seems to be the source of the other blessings? It is not just Acts 2:38. That is the doctrine of salvation but there are several other apostolic teachings. Let me briefly touch on some of them:

1. ***The doctrine of church attendance:***

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of

some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching (Heb 10:25).

2. ***The doctrine of edifying in the church:*** How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying (I Cor 14:26). Let all things be done decently and in order (I Cor 14:40).
3. ***The doctrine of giving:*** Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come (I Cor 16:2).
4. ***The doctrine of leadership in the house:*** For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God? (I Tim 3:5).

5. ***The doctrine of modesty and holiness:*** In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works (I Tim 2:10).
6. ***The doctrine of accountability:*** Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you (Heb 13:17).
7. ***The doctrine of working and self-sustenance:*** And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you (I Thess 4:11).

HOUSE WHERE THE GLORY IS REVEALED

Luk 2:27 And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law,

Luk 2:28 Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said,

Luk 2:29 Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:

Luk 2:30 For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,

For several years, perhaps since childhood, Simeon would find his way to the Temple in Jerusalem. We are not told much about his background. He is one of those innumerable figures in the pages of the Bible who loved God, kept his commandments and understood the importance of regularly worshipping in the Temple. He was not the High Priest nor did he hold any exalted office in the Temple, as far as we know. Like many of you, he was just a

faithful, devoted man of God whose feet habitually frequented the House of God. Every habit has a reward; every habit leads to a consequence. I am sure Simeon would have laughed incredulously like Sara did if he were to have been told that one day his love for the Temple would bring him into contact with Jehovah manifest in flesh. Do you love the house of God? Then one day your devotion to his house, the Church, will set you up for a special meeting – an exclusive rendezvous – with the King of the Universe himself.

Luk 2:25 And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him.

Luk 2:26 And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

I would have loved to see Simeon's reaction to this intimate revelation. The Psalmist said, "The secret of the LORD is with them that fear

him; and he will shew them his covenant' (Psalm 25:14). Going to the House of God should not be construed of as a mechanical exercise. It is after all the house of the God who created the universe with his word (universe comes from 'one word'), the God who divided the Red Sea, calmed the raging Sea of Galilee and raised Lazarus, to name a few miracles. Every step oriented towards the House of God must be imbued with divine expectation. The Temple and Church-goer must expect the unexpected, for who has known God sufficiently to predict his behavior? Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being his counsellor hath taught him? (Isaiah 40:13). Surely, ever since Simeon was given this revelation by the Holy Spirit he redoubled his efforts to visit the House of God. Whenever I promise to do something with my children, and give them a specific time, they pester me with the question: 'what time is it?' We are not told how long Simeon was made to wait.

It is God's mercy that we do not know the precise timing of his will. With respect to all that constitutes for good spiritual training, nothing beats waiting on the Lord with expectation.

Hab 2:3 For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.

Psa 27:14 Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.

Psa 37:34 Wait on the LORD, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land: when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it.

Simeon was told to go to the Temple where he would see the consolation of Israel, the Lord's Christ. I would rather see the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Church than anywhere else. The assumption is that Temple and Church-goers are God-fearers who have submitted to his word. The Levites and Priests who saw the glory of the Lord in the Temple were people who kept the ordinances of the Lord: they had sacrificed, washed in the laver, burned incense, displayed the

shewbread and lit the candlesticks. All that remained was for them to worship and glorify the God of the Temple. The Christian who repents, is baptized in Jesus name and is filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38) is ready to see the Lord Jesus high and lifted up in his church. It should be natural to expect to see the Lord in his House – it is *his* house after all.

Isaiah 6:5 Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.

Isaiah has always surprised me. He was in the Temple, wasn't he? What did expect to see there? If I had hung out for sometime outside the entrance to the King of Norway's palace, it shouldn't come as a shock to see the King of Norway one day alighting out a car and making his way into the palace. He lives there! I leave it to Isaiah to answer what he was doing in the Temple but, clearly, he was totally unprepared for

the encounter that followed. Perhaps there should be a cautionary warning written at the entrance of the church: BEWARE! THE GLORY OF THE KING OF KINGS, JESUS, MAY APPEAR OCCASIONALLY TRIGGERING A POWERFUL EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL RESPONSE IN THE UNPREPARED HEART!

Allow me to shift the focus of this topic somewhat. It is often the case that what is taken for granted may not be adequately explored and we may not fully appreciate it. The issue may be considered in the form of a question: why do we need to see or experience the glory of the Lord? Is it not because God is the origin of our existence, the only guarantor of our safety, the one through whom and in whom our souls find their loftiest meaning, the giver of peace, love, joy and a host of as yet unnamed blessings, and even then I have not scratched the surface? This, saints

of God, is the reason Moses desired to see the glory of God. It was because of this hope – to see his redeemer for himself – that Job refused to curse God and die, that made the heart of David pant for God like the deer and which filled the heart of Simeon with excitement pushing him to attend the Temple. You may see the seven wonders of the ancient and modern world, you may climb Mt. Everest and even walk on the Moon, but I would rather see Jesus, behold his face and declare – My Lord and my God!

Job 19:25 For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth:

Job 19:26 And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: specific to Job 19:27

Job 19:27 Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.

To see him and experience his glory is the ultimate blessing. To have Jesus transfigured before me is what many kings, prophets and wise men would have given anything to experience

even for a few brief moments. And to think that Simeon held the glory of Israel in his arms, that he cradled the One who will carry him to his house in heaven. Oh, for one glimpse of Jesus! Does he not know what we seek? Did not the angel say to Mary, 'And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified' (Matthew 28:5). Let us take comfort from the same salutation of the angel, for we seek Jesus which was crucified, which is why we come here every Sunday. One of these days we will see his glory. Simeon desired to depart after he saw Jesus because he wanted eternal fellowship with Jesus. But, remember, it all began when Simeon decided to seek his God in the Temple. Whatever happens, stay in the house of God.

HOUSE OF EQUALITY

Luke 22:25 And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors.

Luke 22:26 But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.

Luke 22:27 For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth.

The God whose majestic power is demonstrated through his awesome creation is, paradoxically, a humble God. Despite the fact that the pages of the Bible time and again make reference to this fundamental attribute, it appears we humans are unwilling to listen and accept. The *Cambridge Dictionary Online* describes a scandal as: *an action or event that causes a public feeling of shock and strong moral disapproval.* It was a scandal for the Jews to hear Jesus say, ‘Verily, verily, I say unto

you, Before Abraham was, I am' (John 8:58). It was a scandal that God came in the form of a lowly man because we were only willing to accept him as God glorious in majesty and power. God-fearing Jews over the centuries refused to consider any other alternative conception of God. Any other narrative contrary to one of splendor and pomp befitting God was scandalous. So, for instance, Isaiah's 'suffering servant' narrative (Isaiah 53) was just ignored.

Now, in the Scriptures above in Luke, we are introduced to another scandalous aspect of his character: he declared that he had come to *serve*, not to *lord* it over his creatures. Once again this narrative does not fit in with the narrative we have determined for him. If God comes down to us, he must sit on an exalted throne while all humans everywhere prostrate themselves down. Imagine their shock when the God of glory goes down on his knees and demands to wash their feet.

John 13:12 So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you?

John 13:13 Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am.

John 13:14 If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet.

John 13:15 For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.

In the house of God we are all of equal value – and we are all equally valuable. There may be differences of gifts and grace, but every foot is equally beautiful and worthy of service.

In the 1990s, Korean Air, the national carrier of South Korea had such a poor safety record that they could not land in some countries, including the USA. After one particular crash, the Black Box revealed what turned out to be the core problem facing Korean Air. The co-pilot made a feeble attempt to warn the Captain that the plane was about to crash. Just before the crash, a distinct thud was picked up by the

recorder. Sound experts couldn't believe their ears when they realized this was the sound of the Captain slapping the back of the head of the co-pilot. A strict authoritarian hierarchy – a carry-over from the mainstream culture – was blamed for the problems dogging the airline. As a remedial measure, it was determined that the pilots were to be trained by Boeing experts in, among others, John F. Kennedy airport where the culture of deference and subordination was picked apart by the tough-talking flight tower crew. The pilots learned to respond in kind and assert themselves. Within a short time, the safety issues changed for the better with Korean Air having one of the best records. The moral of the story: equality and Christian service can save lives.

Of course the above is not to say that roles have no meaning. Honor must be given to whom honor is due (Romans 13:7). Jesus spoke about the younger and the chief (Luke 22:26). God gave

Israel priests, prophets, kings, Levites, singers, recorders and various other roles, but, the bottom line is that in the house of God, all are of equal value. A good place to explore this is the following:

***1Co 12:12** For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.*

***1Co 12:26** And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.*

A few months ago, as many of you were aware, I was diagnosed with gout. My right foot swelled up mysteriously. It was painful to sit, stand or walk. Initially, I reasoned calmly that once I apply a powerful anti-inflammation gel, I should be back in business in a jiffy. A few days and several generous applications later, the swelling and pain had not subsided. I found myself reading a lot about gout; I even told two doctors who were not sure what it was that it was gout and they agreed. The churches in Hungary,

Holland and Norway were asking me about my gout. My colleagues at the high school also showed concern and gave advice. In short, my right foot became famous in three countries. 'Pictures' were taken of it (X-Rays) and people were asking about it. The body is made in such a way that every part had to chip in and carry the burden of the foot.

The church is compared to the body. All members are equal and all suffer together or rejoice together. Moses could not enter the Promised Land alone. He had to suffer with the children of Israel for 40 years in the desert. No one here can enter heaven alone; God has ordained that the body labor, suffer and rejoice together. In his wisdom he has ordained that the church work together, just like the body, to enter heaven. The twig that falls off the branch is doomed although it may be green for a while.

Perhaps one of the best illustrations of equality in the house of God is David. He was

king, but was glad when others invited him to come to the house of the Lord.

Psalm 122:1 [[A Song of degrees of David.]] I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD.

There is no better place to practice equality inspired by the example of Jesus than in the church. It was in the church with his disciples that he washed their feet. It is in the church that we call each other ‘Brother’ and ‘Sister’. A servant does not need any titles. But what is more honorable, loving and affectionate than to call each other ‘Brother’ and ‘Sister’? In a family, brothers and sisters are equal. They share what they have and they defend each other zealously because they shared the same womb – the same father and mother. Were you born in another womb? Is your Father not my Father, Jesus? Are you going to a different house than the one I am going to?

Mal 2:10 Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal

treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers?

Our spiritual DNA shows that we are blood relatives. This is why our Father delights in our love one for another. Indeed, he has given us a new commandment: that we love one another as he has loved us. In the love of Jesus we are all equal. Let us practice equality in the house of our Father, Jesus.

HOUSE OF GIVING

Luk 21:1 And he looked up, and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury.

Luk 21:2 And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites.

Luk 21:3 And he said, Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all:

Luk 21:4 For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had.

The House of God is a house of giving. Luke records that that the rich men were casting their gifts into the treasury. Did we expect any less of the rich? The earth and the fullness thereof belong to the Lord. The Lord is the owner and, if some people, through talent, connections or sheer luck manage to gather more than their fellow humans, surely they ought to return to God's house and acknowledge him. David says in Psalms 24:1 'The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and

they that dwell therein.’ The apostle James castigates the rich for forgetting the above and living without the fear of God.

Jas 5:1 Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you.

Jas 5:2 Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten.

Jas 5:3 Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.

Jas 5:4 Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth.

Jas 5:5 Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter.

Jas 5:6 Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you.

James has a poignant message for us today: if we have gathered wealth, what will it witness about us? Has it been procured through ill means or honest? But, above all, has none of it ever been within the bounds of the house of God? Coming to the house of God is an antidote

to greed. The rich people in the Temple at least had enough fear of the Lord that they came to the Temple. Who can enter the house of the Lord and not fail to remember that God is the provider? Above his house, so to speak, are the words: 'you are entering the house of *Jehovah Jireh*; the one who clothed you, fed you and loved you.'

Luk 21:2 And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites.

Unlike humans, God takes a keen interest in all that enter his house and evaluates their thoughts and motivations continually. 'Shall not God search this out? for he knoweth the secrets of the heart' (Psalm 44:21). We ought to be thankful that the Lord searches the hearts because we can all makes serious mistakes in judging character. I am glad that he took interest in a certain poor widow. A widow was a woman whose husband had died. In Israel, this was considered a curse of sorts. We remember the story of Naomi and Ruth. Widowhood

foreshadowed poverty and loneliness. In biblical language a widow had no covering – no protection, wealth or reputation. Her only hope was to turn to the Almighty God of Abraham.

1Tim 5:5 Now she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusteth in God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day.

With this background, we are better able to appreciate what the widow in the Temple was doing. She was giving of her poverty to God, her creator. How was such a thing possible? She needed every mite. The miracle lies, I believe, in entering the house of God. Surrounded by the presence of the God who gave everything for us, including himself, it is possible to give from our poverty. Consider your own mother with me for a moment. A mother is made to love and sacrifice. In her presence, your wallet is loosened because of the sheer force of her sacrificial nature. In the presence of Jesus, similarly, in his house, I am reminded of the Cross – the ultimate symbol of self-sacrifice. The Cross conquers the

wallet. Peter may not have been prepared for what he said, but let us not forget that he did keep his word by the grace of the Lord.

Luk 22:33 And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death.

Do we have a problem with giving? Just come to the house of the Giver of life, truth, salvation and eternal life, Jesus Christ. We have schools, centers and institutions that teach everything under the Sun, but have you ever come across the College of Giving, or the Institute for the Advanced Studies of Giving? This is something we only learn about in the House of God – The Church.

2Co 8:7 Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also.