

THE MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF EFI PUBLICATION TRUST

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A Journey of Faith



LENT

A SEASON OF RENEWAL



There's a ghost in most churches – the Holy Ghost (as the Spirit of God was named in the King James Version of the Bible). On the other hand, there have also been various divisions and controversies in the Church owing to different interpretations of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

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Editorial



Rev. Vijayesh Lal

Be sure you know the conditions of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds; for riches do not endure forever, and a crown is not secure for all generations. – Proverbs 27:34-35

Whoever sows injustice reaps calamity, and the rod they wield in fury will be broken. (Proverbs 22:8)

The Bible mentions a king by the name of Ahab who through injustice took the land (vineyard) of a man, a farmer, called Naboth. The king who already had enough property wanted this vineyard to turn it into a vegetable garden. Naboth, who viewed it as a land of promise from God, a land that God gave to his ancestors, and something that cannot be sold according to Mosaic law, refuses to give it to the king who viewed land merely as a transferrable commodity.

When the king grew sad because he

could not have the land, his queen, Jezebel, takes matters into her hand, implicates Naboth in a false case of blasphemy with the help of her cronies, has him stoned to death, and makes way for her husband to take possession of the land. Injustice in this case, followed false worship as the king and queen operated out of a different world view than was expected from them as people responsible for the flock of Yahweh.

One can read the whole account of this abuse of power in 1 Kings Chapter 21. A point to be noted here is that even when the owner of the vineyard was dead, the land should have gone to his descendants, his family, but instead the king takes control of it by force.

The story does not end there for God notices. And he sends Elijah, who in obedience to God, risks his own life in confronting and denouncing the king. Eventually both Ahab and his

wife pay the price and not only they but their family too, as Ahab's son dies without a successor.

The people in authority in their thirst for more, with the aid of their cronies, slandered an innocent man and killed him to take over his property. The powerless at the mercy of the whims of the powerful and the system. Or so it seems, till God intervenes. The story is a reminder that the abuse of power always hurts. Sin always hurts.

The farmers in India have been protesting for more than six months now and have been camped at the border of Delhi for over three months. Talks between the government and the leaders of the farmer unions have reached no conclusion and the movement is now spreading to villages and towns via *Mahapanchayats* and large meetings. The farmers have announced that they will campaign against the ruling party in states that are due for elections. Balbir Singh Rajewal of the Bharatiya Kisan Union told a joint press conference, "We will tell people about Modi government's attitude towards farmers."

The farmers are not the only ones to complain about the attitude of the government. On 11th January 2021, the Chief Justice of India told the Attorney General: "We are extremely disappointed with the way Centre is dealing with this." The

Supreme Court questioned the government for passing these laws without consultation. The government responded with a 45-page affidavit stating that these laws were shaped after two decades of intense deliberations and consultations with stakeholders. Right to Information applications asking for information about these consultations have resulted in officials claiming that they did not have a record of the consultations and a second response that says that since the matter is sub-judice, "it may not be feasible at this moment to provide information,". Earlier a RTI filed by NDTV also got the same response from the chief public information officer, saying that the government "does not hold any record in this matter".

The way of handling the protests in the media and particularly in the social media has also raised many questions. There were attempts to link the protests with Khalistani separatists at the outset itself. Efforts were ostensibly made to make it a Hindu vs Sikh issue and hence to give it a communal colour. The unfortunate event on the Red Fort on the Republic Day, which the farmer unions also condemned, was apparently used by certain media houses to give the whole protest an anti-national tag.

Journalists, activists were arrested, some under sedition laws, and the ministry of external affairs had to get

involved on social media to combat the international attention that the protests were receiving. Water, electricity and internet were cut off from protest sites as the administration turned them into areas that resembled fortresses by digging roads, constructing, barricading and laying nails on the ground. And yet the crowds swelled at the protest sites. All of this, unfortunately, has served only to increase the gap between the government and the farmer unions and has produced no solution.

According to reports an average farmer's family survives on an income of only around 6400 Rupees per month. Nearly 3,00,000 farmers have committed suicide between 1995 – 2015 according to data from NCRB and even today, on an average, around 20 farmers commit suicide daily as per report from Down to Earth. As a nation, we seem to have failed our farmers. Even during the protest in the last three months, more than 200 farmers have lost their lives camping at the border of Delhi.

The farm sector in India is in need of reforms and there may be no denying this. But the way those reforms have to be brought in is via consultation and building trust. The government must make sure that the voice of the stakeholders is not stifled and is listened to. Branding farmers Khalistani and slandering them as anti-national may be convenient

from a social media and PR point of view, but it will produce no solution. That would only come by humbly gaining the trust of the farmers through their representatives, by dialogue and by coming to their side in empathy. That would be just and that would bring peace.

The Church must realise its prophetic role and responsibility and actively engage in the promotion of peace and justice, even though such an engagement be costly. We are called to engage with the poor and the marginalized but also with those in positions of power and authority. We are called to apply God's Word to every area of our lives - from our homes to our institutions and to social justice.

At the same time, we must remember to pray for peace in the country, for wisdom and empathy for the government and for the protestors that their concerns and their voice would be heard. We must pray that the matter would be resolved by dialogue amicably and peacefully and that those who wish to turn this into a communal struggle for their political or organizational gains would be exposed and not succeed.

“True peace is not merely the absence of tension: it is the presence of justice.” - Martin Luther King Jr.

Rev. Vijayesh Lal



Christian Leadership and Moral Failure

Reflections on the Ravi Zachariah
Story by Rev. Dr. Vinay Samuel

Introduction:- In the past two months I have noticed an increasing number of articles, comments, discussions on the Ravi Zachariah scandal in magazines and, social media platforms. In his blog a well respected North American evangelical scholar John Stackhouse suggested that Ravi Zachariah (RZ) attempts to inflate his academic qualifications and status may reflect Ravi's Indian background of spiritual "Gurus". India has given a significant number of 'spiritual' gurus to the west. Academics have rarely considered Indian Gurus as intellectual leaders. Ravi did present himself as an intellectual leader and was acknowledged as such by his followers and admirers, one even going so far as to call him a contemporary C.S. Lewis. The

Evangelical marketing industry in the United States puffs up intelligent, creative and excellent communicators of the gospel, especially if they have exotic origins and are photogenic. It inflates people beyond recognition and deflates and discards them just as quickly when scandals emerge.

My reflections express how I as an Indian Christian pastor attempted to process this international story with a subtext that challenges all Indian Christian leaders especially those who have ministered internationally.

Called and Anointed by God to serve him.

Although I had very little interaction with RZ and did not know him personally I have thanked God for Ravi's clear and powerful ministry of

proclaiming and defending the gospel of Christ. The Lord used him to touch many lives all over the world. The calling and anointing of RZ by God was obvious to me and many of my colleagues. His ministry did not appear or sound fake or counterfeit. When the stories about his academic credential exaggeration and sexual immorality began to surface I began to have questions about his calling and anointing.

The Bible reminded me forcefully that the gifts and calling of God will not be recalled by him (Romans 11:25). As believers we are sealed with the Spirit; as those called to be evangelists, pastors and teachers we are gifted and anointed by the Holy Spirit and there is no suggestion in scripture that God withdraws gifts he bestows or his anointing. King David was called and anointed and fell into grievous sin with a willful disregard of God's moral standards. God raised a Prophet to challenge him. He was chastised by God and restored. King Saul was also anointed, failed morally, chastised but was not restored.

I do not know if the Lord raised a prophetic voice to call RZ to accountability and whether the Lord

chastised him, but like he used David for his purposes, the fruits of Ravi's ministry will stand, and I wish to acknowledge that many people experienced God's grace and received God's knowledge through him. RZ was unable to resist temptation in one or two areas of his life and allowed himself to slip scandalously.

I believe the Spirit of God wrestled with him in the areas of his weakness. He died before his Church or the Christian community was able to discipline and restore him. RZ may not have persevered in holy living but the Lord who called and anointed him would have persevered with him. Our sanctification depends on the perseverance of God's Spirit more than our own obedience, who can ascend the hill of the Lord except by God's grace and patience?

Evangelical Leadership Culture: strengths and weaknesses

The second area of my reflection concerns the change in evangelical culture in its attitude to leaders. Much has been written about the "celebrity culture" that pervades some parts of evangelicalism. We are also reminded of the great man/great

leader culture that dominates political and religious cultures today. In politics or religion “Big” leaders attract unquestioned loyalty and support from many people.

I believe the change began when evangelicals focused on outcomes of evangelistic and mission activity and neglected the focus on character and holy living of our leaders. Leaders began to be assessed particularly for their evangelistic and mission success. 54 years ago, when I came to Christ evangelicalism was about evangelistic crusades, personal evangelism and about holy living. Keswick conventions, Holiness meetings were as important as evangelistic campaigns. A.W Tozer, Isobel Kuhn, Borden of Yale was my spiritual diet. I was not judged primarily by numbers brought to Christ, churches planted, miraculous experiences and demonstrations of spiritual power.

Then management experts who were Christians moved into evangelicalism and were allowed to shape it to focus on strategy, outcomes, numbers, impact etc.

I acknowledge that all those were needed but they should not have taken the central place, and shaped

our leadership culture and even unintentionally making character of the leader secondary to his/her ability to produce impressive outcomes in mission and evangelism.

The idea of empowerment by the Spirit focused on empowered to achieve spectacular spiritual impact demonstrating THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT in healing, prophecy, prosperity and church growth. The power of the spirit to convict God's people of sin, to cleanse, restore and renew their spiritual life was not stressed enough. Increasingly a leaders' ministry skills and impact appeared to confirm the power of the spirit and spiritual anointing and the leader's spiritual maturity reflecting humility and integrity was rarely highlighted.

If a leader can preach what thrills us, deliver what we want in numbers attending meetings, bring in the finances to fuel growth and impact, his/her lifestyle is not the object of scrutiny. On the contrary any hint of criticism is loudly pushed back.

For the past thirty years I am involved in equipping senior leaders for the global church. Most come from evangelical churches,

denominations and mission organizations experiencing significant growth. All face the same challenge of supporting pastors and Christian leaders to live holy and humble lives.

The RZ scandal reminds us that we need to restore holiness of life to the center of the culture of evangelical leadership.

Conclusion

The turn to judge Christian leadership primarily through their ability to achieve growth in numbers and budgets developed in North America. It dominates evangelical leadership culture there. It is not present to any such degree among evangelicals in the United Kingdom or Europe. An evangelical scholar from South Africa suggests that it is spreading in Africa particularly after the rise of Trumpism and its connection to American evangelicals. RZ was a product of American evangelicalism and

attempts to suggest that his failures had something to do with his Indian background are unfounded. American evangelical culture has vast resources and seeks to influence the church globally. This is one area I trust we will resist its weakness. In India we need to enable the building of accountability mechanisms to support Christian leadership, so it conforms more to biblical teaching than to a market shaped world.



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Farmers and their Tractors.....

Dr. Shantanu Dutta

For many months now, farmers have been protesting at Delhi's border, demanding the withdrawal of India's recently passed farm bills. Although led by farmers from Punjab and Haryana, the issues raised concerns of farmers across the country. The government's seeming reluctance to engage them, even though protests have been going on for three months in several states, has aggravated the situation. While farmer incomes have been worsening since 2011-12, their condition has worsened in recent years, leading to a build-up of anger. Their income decline is partly a result of an overall fall in demand in India's economy, which has pressured farm-gate prices. It is also a result of rising input prices and other costs of cultivation. The Centre's farm reforms should be seen in the context of these long-term

trends. While they are in many ways a continuation of past attempts to reform the agricultural marketing system and open agricultural trade to the private sector, they have come at a time when the farm sector is suffering the twin blows of a slowing economy and the Covid pandemic. These have led to a fall in demand for agricultural commodities, not least because of restrictions that have hurt the hospitality industry and catering for weddings and social gatherings. With nearly 60 percent of the Indian population depending on agriculture for their livelihoods, the growing farmer seems to have created concern in the government.

Some ministers have tried to allay farmers' fears about the new laws while also dismissing their concerns. Some of the party leaders have called

the farmers "misguided" and "anti-national," a label often given to those who criticize government policies. Many opposition party leaders, activists and even some allies of the ruling party have called the laws anti-farmer and expressed support for those protesting. What should Christians do if they wish to express their solidarity or should they even ?

The current pandemic of COVID-19 has forced many Christians out of their armchairs to consider the real-life implications of how to be a Christian and a citizen. This is not a bad thing. It is easy to lose sight of the fact that on the whole, it was relatively easy for us to be a Christian and a law-abiding citizen of any faith till not-so-distant times. But now, we are being pushed a little beyond our comfort zone, and many Christians are struggling to know how to self-consciously live out God's command: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities" (Romans 13:1).

When I say it is easy to be a Christian and a citizen, I do not mean that our government is perfect. Tragically, I do not think everyone is treated fairly under the rule of law. Additionally, I am suspicious that there's legislation that violates the Constitution or creates loopholes to

existent laws. Admittedly, there's also regulations and ordinances that inconvenience my life. Yet, in the midst of this pandemic, many Christians are wondering if we are living in such a time that may require us to be faithful to God at the expense of obeying the law — we are living in a time where Christians are examining the subject of civil disobedience.

We need to carefully have a heart-check. There are times when as Christians we need to disobey our governing authorities (see Acts 5:29). But it is only when they require us to be disobedient to God — when the only way we can obey them is to be unfaithful to God. For the Christian, civil disobedience does not arise out of patriotic flag waving on Republic Day while holding the Constitution; as in the Netflix offering.... Flt Lt Gunjan Mehta's dad points out The Air Force does not need people who can shout "Bharat Mata ki Jai" but those who know how to fly planes and fly them well.... it does not arise out of anti-government sentiment or political leanings; it does not arise because we are inconvenienced by the law or draconian measures; it does not arise out of some macho sense of being able to stick it to the man.

For the Christian, the only motivation for civil disobedience is a deep biblical conviction that obedience to man would be disobedience to God. And when an informed conscience demands such disobedience, we must also receive the consequences counting our loss to be our gain: "When they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus and let them go. Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the name" (Acts 5:40-41....

So, what is your way to express solidarity with the farmers ?



Dr. Shantanu Dutta

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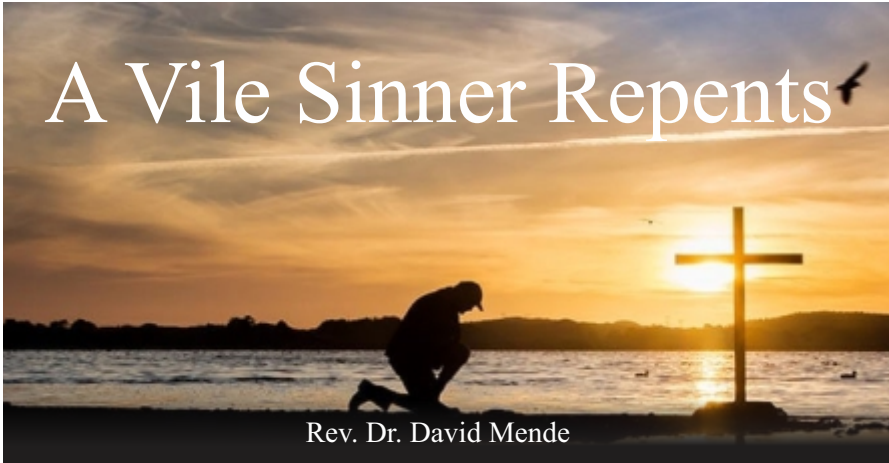
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A Vile Sinner Repents



Rev. Dr. David Mende

Introduction

When I was in my teens, I used to think that I can surrender my life to Christ when I become old. Many people presume that they can enjoy the pleasures of the world and then repent of their sins on their deathbed. As a result, they harden their hearts. Many people waste their lives by living for themselves. Some die a sudden death without ever surrendering their lives to Christ. Even if they live longer, most of them are unable to repent of their sins because their hearts are hardened. Their hearts don't respond to the Spirit's work anymore.

In this article, we are going to meditate on the last-minute salvation of a criminal. But note that this is the only recorded deathbed salvation in

all of the Bible. It is recorded in Luke 23:39-43.

We can learn three lessons from this passage.

1. It's Foolish to Reject Christ (Lk. 23:39).

The soldiers deliberately hanged Jesus between two criminals to humiliate him. This is probably an illusion to Isaiah 53:12, which says that the servant of the Lord is numbered with the transgressors. Some say that these criminals may be revolutionaries who wanted to overthrow the Roman government.

The term "hanged" means crucified (cf. Acts 5:30; 10:39; Gal. 3:13; also Deut. 21:22-23). Interestingly, the phrase "railed at" is in the imperfect tense in Greek, which suggests that

the first criminal kept blaspheming. The question, "Are you not the Christ?" in Greek presupposes "yes" for an answer. This criminal spoke sarcastically as he joined the Romans and the Jewish leaders in mocking Jesus. Like the men who were holding Jesus in custody (22:65), this criminal railed (*blasphēmeō*) at Jesus.

Generally, the crucified criminals cursed their persecutors. I guess that after hurling abuses at the Roman soldiers, the criminal now targeted Christ and vented out his frustration on him. This criminal didn't believe that Jesus is the Messiah. Even today, some people disbelieve Jesus and thus blaspheme his holy name. Some harden their hearts and eventually, they perish.

We may not be as sinful as this hardcore criminal was, but even after getting saved, we want God to act on our own terms. We rebel against God. As Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" Our hearts are still deceitful. As Isaiah prophesies, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6). Apostle Paul rightly says, "all have

sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Some people harden their hearts all their life and reject the life-giver, Jesus Christ.

It's foolish to reject Christ.

2. We Can Be Saved through Repentance and Faith in Christ (Lk. 23:40-42).

As in 5:1-11, Luke focuses on one person present in a group. In verse 42, the criminal's words are a petition as well as a confession of faith. Interestingly, Mark 15:32b says that "Those who were crucified with him also reviled him" (cf. Mt. 27:44). Luke alone mentions that this criminal trusts Jesus (cf. Mt. 27:41-44; Mark 15:31-32). Probably, Jesus' calm attitude on the cross and the intercession for his persecutors (v. 34) caused this criminal to repent. Also, the punishment on the cross probably made him desperate to receive salvation. Some don't surrender their life to Christ until they are pushed against the wall.

In verse 40, the second criminal rebukes the other one for not fearing God. The first criminal forgot that "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31). God is love, but he is also the God of wrath. We must fear God.

The second criminal realizes that Jesus has done "nothing wrong" (v. 41). Like the other marginalized people mentioned in Luke's Gospel (cf. 7:1-10, 36-50; 8:43-48; 19:1-10), the second criminal has an amazing insight into the identity of Christ. Like Peter (5:8), the second criminal realizes his own sinfulness and Christ's holiness.

The criminal goes on to say, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" (v. 42). He addresses the Lord as "Jesus" which means "Savior." In Luke's Gospel, when people seek restoration, they address the Lord as "Jesus" (17:13; 18:38). The criminal asks Jesus to remember him. We often ask a person in authority to "remember" us; in other words, to help us (cf. Gen. 40:14, 23; 1 Sam. 25:31). So, he was desperately seeking Jesus' help.

Interestingly, this criminal is the first person to recognize that Jesus' cruel death is not in contradiction with his role as the Savior. He also recognized that cross would be followed by glory (cf. Acts 5:30-31). The second criminal was no better than the other one. The only difference is that this criminal realized his sinfulness and confessed it. Only God's grace can transform our sinful hearts.

This criminal had great faith. He didn't say, "if" but "when you come in your kingdom" (v. 42). Jesus was hanging on the cross helplessly. Many people were mocking Christ. But the second criminal believed that Jesus will come back into his kingdom.

In verse 42, the word "said" is in the imperfect tense in Greek. In other words, the second criminal kept saying, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Just as this criminal confessed his sinfulness, we too must daily confess our sins before the Lord. Listen to the psalmist's confession in Psalm 32:5: I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.

This criminal sinned greatly against God and man. But he repented of his sins. Let's see how the Lord responds to this criminal's plea.

3. Salvation Is a Free and Gracious Gift from God (Lk. 23:43).

Here, "said" is in the aorist tense in Greek. That is Jesus said these words once and for all. It caused the Lord a lot of pain to utter these great words of assurance. Jesus was in excruciating pain as he said these

words. Along with that, he carried the unbearable weight of our sins on the cross.

"Truly" indicates that the following words are emphatic. Jesus' promise is certain. He will not go back on it! Jesus immediately ("today"; cf. 2:11; 4:21; 5:26; 19:5, 9) grants salvation to this criminal. Here, "Paradise" is a Persian word. Originally, it referred to a garden or park.

It is a synonym for heaven or the new creation. It is the dwelling place of God and the eternal home of those who are saved (cf. 2 Cor. 12:3; Rev. 2:7).

Interestingly, the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) uses the same Greek word (*paradeisos*) to refer to the Garden of Eden in Genesis 2:8-9 (cf. Isa. 51:3). By referring to Paradise, Jesus is probably talking about restoring the personal and intimate relationship that humans had with God in the Garden of Eden before the fall. The criminal wanted to experience salvation sometime in the future. But Jesus gave him more than he asked for (cf. Eph. 3:20). Our Lord graciously granted salvation on that same day.

Jesus' body would be buried in a tomb, but his spirit would go to

Paradise. Three days later, his resurrected body and spirit would be reunited. But this criminal would be with Jesus on that same day. Paradise is all about being with Jesus! Heaven is heaven not because of the streets of gold or the angels or the great saints of God. Heaven is where Jesus is. Yes, eternal life is to know the triune God (Jn 17:3). Think about this: This crucified criminal would be with the sinless Son of God! One day, this criminal would have a place when God's kingdom would fully come!

This story teaches that salvation is by faith alone (Eph. 2:8-9). It also shows that it's never too late to surrender our lives to Christ. This criminal had a literal deathbed conversion. No one is beyond God's saving grace. We must keep interceding for the salvation of our loved ones.

However, as I mentioned at the beginning of this article, we must not inordinately delay our salvation. The more you delay your salvation, the more your heart will be hardened. Remember that this is the only last-minute salvation recorded in the Bible. As J. C. Ryle wrote, "One thief on the cross was saved, that none should despair; but only one, that none should presume."

Christ changed the destiny of the second criminal. In the afternoon, the criminal was hanging on a cross. In the next few hours, the second criminal was with Christ in Paradise. Apostle Paul writes that the moment we die, we will be in the presence of the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8). The criminal's circumstances didn't change even after Christ promised that he will be in Paradise. He was still hanging on the cross. Jesus doesn't always take away all our sufferings on this earth. But he promises something better. Praise God for giving us the free and gracious gift of salvation!

Conclusion

The main message I want to highlight in this article is: **Be eternally grateful to the Lord for granting you the free and gracious gift of salvation.** Let's thank the Lord each day for the great salvation he has granted us. Let's serve him diligently and joyfully. Let's cling to him even during tough times.

William Cowper wrote a well-known hymn which goes like this:

*There is a fountain filled with
blood,
Drawn from Immanuel's veins.
And sinners plunged beneath that
flood
Lose all their guilty stains.*

*The dying thief rejoiced to see,
That fountain in his day.
And there may I, though vile as he,
Wash all my sins away.*

In many ways, we are as vile as that criminal. Though we don't deserve God's grace, we received it. Though we couldn't earn our salvation, the Lord saved us. Let's be eternally grateful to him!

P.S. This article is adapted from Dr. David Mende's up-coming book, *The Seven Sayings of the Savior*, which is due for release in mid-March. You may contact him for copies of this book.



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In the sight of God

*For what is highly esteemed among men is an
abomination in the sight of God (Luke 16:15)*

Rev. Sanjiv Ailawadi

Twice in Revelations, John said mankind did not repent. Both (9.20,21 and 16.9,11) were after devastating global environmental damage, mighty oceanic turbulences, meteorite disasters, extensive locust swarms and terrible death plagues. They did not repent of the works of their hands, worshipping demons, greed for economic gain, murders, sorceries, sexual immorality, or their thefts. Repentance is born out of an inner conviction of our hearts. External circumstances lead to some change, but lasting change comes from the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Against billions (a third of the world) dying as prophesied in these passages, Covid in comparison is a fleeting puff of air, a mere 2.5 million dead, just 0.03%! For the worshipping community therefore, Covid serves as a definite foretaste of things to come, whenever that

happens. The fact that mankind will not repent is a reminder that we need to be rightly located ourselves in our hearts. I believe we are to reconsider some critical areas, one of which is the question of success.

What is success? My wife and I are in our 40th year of marriage. People congratulate us on being successfully married.

But the opposite is also true. When I asked a man if he was married a few years back, he told me that he was successfully divorced! Shana Lebowitz in an article in Business Insider, redefines divorce as 'to have successfully matured into outgrowing the need for marriage'.

Success in our world usually refers to bank balances, status, property, children being financially secure, happily married. By that yardstick, you could be a hardworking honest

individual or a corrupt criminal yet have the same benchmark.

We define success by the way we achieve what we have valued. If we value people, we will define success on those terms. Have we helped people, have we good strong relationships with people, are we known as people who are compassionate?

If we value status and position, we will define success on those terms. Have we made it to the top spot in our careers, are we famous and well known?

Are these mutually exclusive? Can we succeed in terms of both value systems? If our focus is entirely on care and having loving strong relationships, we will have to junk the career option at some point. We can only be married to our career or to our spouse. It's either time with our kids, or time gazing at a screen in endless plane journeys on a quest to further our wonderful career.

Our value systems determine our goals. The goals we live towards will be known by the legacy we leave behind. What do people remember us for, what is that which we have left with others? Aiden Wilson Tozer was born into a very poor family. He was self-taught, never attended school or university. But he became a great speaker, a great writer, and a great leader. He wrote sixty books, many of which I have

personally read and re-read because these are filled with so much wisdom and challenge. He gave away much of his earnings and lived simply.

His wife remarried after he died, and she made an interesting statement. She said Aiden loved God, but her present husband loved her. Their six children had the same story. Their father's goal was so caught up in doing wonderful things out there, that he was barely present for his family.

What are our goals in life? Are these people based or are material? If people based, the thermometer of our success will be our family's emotional health. If material, the thermometer of our success will be our current economic worth.

All of us live by a script. This script is written in partly by the world we are born into but added on by us as life goes on. The narratives most often found around us are (adapted from Walter Brueggemann's writings):

- Comfort: our scripts are comfort based looking for the least way to get the most investment for ourselves
- Science: everything can be fixed or made right, eventually science will have the answer to everything
- Material: we live in a culture of consumption whether it is consumption of sex, or

consumption of material goods.

- Hostile: we are an increasingly hostile people who fight fiercely to protect our own. We legitimise violence to get our own way.

While this narrative promises us happiness, it has failed to make us a people who care, love, and are compassionate.

George Ritzer wrote (McDonaldization, 1993): 'When society adopts the characteristics of a fast-food restaurant:

- It becomes time efficient.
- It becomes quantitative (how much is sold) rather than qualitative (how good was the taste) i.e. market driven.
- It becomes uniform--- the same taste and service everywhere.
- It becomes inhuman – everything is mechanised and impersonal.

It would seem the world has moved far beyond what he wrote twenty-eight years back. We are time-centric, not people centred; we are concerned more with the quantity we have hoarded than the quality of our characters; we are no longer unique creative individuals, instead have become one of the thousands in a rat-race to nowhere; we are no longer empathetic caring individuals, but indifferent, cold, and uncaring.

Jesus while speaking of the last days compared the time to the days of Noah. Luke 17.26-28: 26 And as it

was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: 27 They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. 28 Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built.

Basically, Jesus said: there was the absence of critical reflection. Critical reflection causes us to ask: why we are doing what we are doing? It poses the question: what is the human cost of success? It reflects on how there are inherent contradictions in the way we live: are we seeking happiness at the cost of others being happy?

This time of a global plague could be viewed as a time of critical recovery: the recovery of the understanding of God in relationship with ourselves. The worshipping community needs to recover our beginnings: we came from God: We therefore need to remember we are here to serve Him, not ourselves. Success must be defined from the sense of our belonging to God.

We need to recover our sense of journey: we are going back to God. We are therefore accountable to Him for all we do. God is not interested in our positions, our bank balances, or our influence. He is interested in what we are on the inside. Success lies in the state of our hearts: are we

generous, loving, kind people who share our resources? Are we righteous people who seek the approval of God? Are we trustworthy, faithful people who can be relied upon?

We belong to God, but so does everyone else. We therefore need to recover a sense of community with our neighbour: He is our Father, not my Father. We therefore have a responsibility that extends to all others, not just ourselves or our families.

Paul in the bible, in terms of this world would be described as a successful individual. Let's see his accomplishments.

- He was a Pharisee, a highly influential class of people.
- He was a Roman citizen, so had the rights and privileges of the conquerors in his land.
- He was taught by the most famous teacher of the time, Gamaliel, it's like the MIT of our times.
- He wrote almost half the books of the New Testament, or almost a fifth of the books of the entire Bible.
- He had immense intellectual and academic depth.
- He went on four great journeys to establish many churches.

- He was powerful in miracles: he raised people from the dead.

However, he says: what things were gain to me, I consider as rubbish for the sake of being found in God (Phil 3.8). The story of my success is not in what I have accomplished, these things will not follow me when I die. What will remain is my relationship with God, His approval of me, being loving, kind, and sacrificial just like His Son Jesus.

Authentic success is ultimately measured in our knowing God, developing a relationship with Him, and walking according to His ways, going where He sends us. All else may be good and useful, but if we pay no heed to God, the state of the world reminds us what a mess we can be in. Let us repent of those values we have allowed to deviate us from being found in Christ.

In the sight of God.



Rev. Sanjiv Ailawadi
Sr. Pastor, New Generation Church

Psalm 119:50 "This is my comfort in my affliction. that your promise gives me life."

Dependent girls growing into empowered women

Covid19 has paused lives for many, leading to vulnerability all across India. Countless reports have stated a constant rise in migration, child labour and child marriages.



In response to such evils, EFIC@R has made arrangements and provided livelihood skills training on

tailoring in West Bengal to help women, susceptible to exploitation, gain financial independence and be protected from exploitative situations.

Sisters Noorah* (18 years) and Rukmini* (21 years) were in the first batch of the trainings. Due to the lockdown, their family was facing financial crisis. With their father, who was the only breadwinner losing his job; both the sisters were made to drop out of school. The sisters are already at a marriageable age according to Indian Law. With increasing number of girls being sold in the name of marriage during the pandemic due to financial

restraints, the sisters were also at the risk of being "sold" off.

Both the sisters have dreams of their own and wanted to finish their studies. This was not possible if there was no source of income. So, when they heard about EFIC@R livelihood centre, they enrolled themselves and started to diligently attend the tailoring course.

After completing the training, the two sisters bought their own personal machine after shelling out whatever savings they had. With one machine, the sisters are working together and preparing the orders that they have been receiving. They are now able to earn enough money to provide for their family as well as save up money for their education.

**Name changed to protect identity*



Ms. Aashima Samuel.
*National Director,
EFI – Children @ Risk (EFIC@R)*



There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under
the heavens:

a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot,
a time to kill and a time to heal,
a time to tear down and a time to
build,
a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to
dance,
a time to scatter stones and a time
to gather them,
a time to embrace and a time to
refrain from embracing,
a time to search and a time to give
up,
a time to keep and a time to throw
away,
a time to tear and a time to mend,
a time to be silent and a time to
speak,
a time to love and a time to hate,

a time for war and a time for peace
(Eccl. 3:1-8).

Well, what is Lent a time for? It's a
time to get crazy about being
devoted to our Lord.

Importance of Symbols

To start, think of Lent as a symbol. Symbolism is a means of communication. Symbols are visual aids. The Old Testament is replete with them. All the sacrifices were prescribed to demonstrate that God was concerned about sin in people's lives and that in His mercy, He provided a way of propitiation. The call to holiness was symbolized by total withdrawal from pagan society and practices.

In the New Testament too, there are symbolisms such as Christian baptism and the Lord's Supper to

convey God's message. Baptism depicted allegiance to Christ as Lord and the Lord's Supper symbolised that Christ is sustenance of believers.

Sometimes, Christians who belong to new groups (non-mainline denominations) are against the observance of special days, forgetting that symbols are theological shorthand. It is the ritualization of doctrinal beliefs. Of course, the trouble with the use of symbols is that too often their meanings are forgotten, and people then perform rituals mechanically.

The Christian calendar is one aspect of the symbolic in the Church's life that needs to be rediscovered. The entire Christian Year is a theological statement. It begins with the Advent or Coming of Christ and is meant to prepare us for the Second Advent. As the Year progresses, it takes us through the life experiences of our Lord, the coming of the Holy Spirit and ends with the period called "Kingdomtide", envisioning the coming reign of Jesus as King of kings and the establishment of God's kingdom of justice and peace.

Customs and Rituals

Lent comes after Advent and Epiphany (revelation of our Lord). The word "Lent" is derived from the Old English word *lenten* meaning

spring, probably referring to the fact that from spring the days grow longer. Lent is 40 days from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday, not counting the Sundays. Sundays are not part of Lent, because as the Lord's Day (of Resurrection) they are feast days. Yes, you may eat meat and fish on Sundays in Lent. You may feast.

Ash Wednesday is the day that marks the beginning of Lent. Its name is derived from the fact that ash (obtained by burning the palm crosses distributed on Palm Sunday in the previous year) was applied to the foreheads of devotees attending the Ash Wednesday service. The ash symbolized penitence for sins committed. As people came in penitence to the altar, the priest would apply the ash to their foreheads, and would say, "Remember O man (or woman or boy or girl), that thou art mortal. Remember that thou art dust and to dust thou shalt return."

Human mortality is tied to the Fall of Adam and Eve, and so to be reminded of our mortality is to be informed that we are guilty of sin. The ash reminds us that our ruin is complete, because when anything is reduced to ashes, there is nothing more to burn and nothing left to recover. That is what sin does to us. It

ruins us completely, making us unfit for God's company.

Journey Back to God

But in Bible times when people sat in ashes or had ashes on themselves, it symbolized their repentance – a complete turnaround of their lives. Thus, the churchgoer with ashes marking his or her forehead was saying that they had realized the error of their ways and was beginning to turn back to God.

Lent was to be observed by making it a time for prayer, almsgiving and self-denial. Unfortunately, self-denial came to be defined as giving up foods and festivities. Around the world, during Lent most Christians observe what might be described as a partial fast: they give up eating meat, fish and eggs, though they probably don't know why. Some of them must imagine that they do so to share in the sufferings of Christ. But that's not why the practice started. Easter was the day when those who had been preparing were baptized. They prepared for baptism through abstinence and other acts of devotion, commemorating the 40 days of fasting that Jesus went through (though, in His case it was after His baptism).

The problem with observing something just for the sake of observing is that it is purely ritual.

When people do things as a matter of ritual, they subconsciously are in the mode of meeting a requirement. What that attitude implies is, "If I do such and such, I score." So, the ritual observance of Lent boils down to saying to God, "Please do note how I torture myself to please you. You have to give me points for giving up fish and meat which I love." Put that way, you can see why ritual observances are contrary to the gospel of our Lord Jesus. Thus, Lent cannot be about giving up fish, meat, chocolates, ice cream and movies.

All religions are about working one's way to heaven. But the Lord said that the only way to get to heaven was solely and entirely through Him (Jn. 14:6). That is why Paul took issue with the Christians at Galatia for allowing themselves to be diverted from the gospel of grace (1:6-7; 3:1-5).

Denial of Self

If we are going to engage in fasting as a spiritual exercise, we need to learn how to fast. For a fast to be a fast, what we give up must be offered to God. It's not about torturing yourself. God doesn't take pleasure in that sort of thing (See Isa. 58:5). The two things He wants you to do when fasting are:

1. Caring to share with others (vv. 6-7, 10)

2. Drawing near to God (vv. 8-9, 13-14)

So, if you are observing the discipline of giving up something "for God", collect your "savings" from giving up meat, fish and eggs, and offer it all to God through His people in need.

We need to understand "self-denial" according to the Lord's teaching. Jesus said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me" (Lk. 9:23).

Clearly, self-denial is not a temporary act, but a permanent change in the way of life. In the ritual observance of Lent, people give up fish and meat, but go back to them. That is not self-denial, but denying your self some things for a short period.

Secondly, biblical self-denial is a displacement of the self, because the self is replaced:

- Deny your self—take up the cross (Lk. 9:23)
- Not my will, but Thine be done (Mk. 14:36)
- Not I, but Christ... (Gal. 2:20, KJV)

Lent is not about giving up fish and meat. It is about denying your self—giving up your selfishness,

your aim, your lifestyle. For Christ.

Since Lent marks the days before the crucifixion of our Lord, let's look at the two who denied themselves during that period so totally, that our Lord Himself remarked appreciatively about their acts.

Widow's Large Mite

Jesus was at the Temple with His disciples, who were country bumpkins and were easily wonderstruck by the riches of the city. They were impressed with everything that was big and grand (Lk. 21:5). It would not be amiss to think that they drew attention to the large donations being made by rich folks just as they talked about the size of the stones used to construct the Temple. That had to be the reason Jesus talked to them about a poor widow's giving (vv.1-4). The rich had given larger amounts, but Jesus pointed to the fact that they only gave a small bit out of their abundance. After giving, they could continue to live in luxury. Their gifts would make no difference to their way of life.

The widow, on the other hand, was a very needy person. She was destitute with no one to support her. Those two mites were not just a portion of her small living, but "all that she had, even all her living."

She lived daily from hand to mouth; but on that day, as Jesus watched, she gave away all that she had earned for the day. Giving even one mite would have been extravagant, but she gave both – all she had. That night did she go to bed hungry? For all we know, she did.

Once an extremely rich Christian handed me a teeny-weeny donation claiming that it was his "widow's mite" for the need I had put before the congregation. Jesus had drawn attention to its largeness, but the man likened the widow's gift to the paltry sum he was giving to God's work. We subconsciously commend ourselves on giving as the widow did when we claim to be giving our widow's mite. Jesus commended her for her large giving, and we have regarded it an excuse for small giving. The widow's mite, when given, left her with nothing. No, the Lord did not commend her for the smallness of her gift, but for its largeness. Give little, if you want; but let's not call our gift the "widow's mite" and by that render Jesus' commendation false.

Give largely, for small giving is reluctant giving. It is more a case of keeping back, than giving.

Remember, what the widow did happened just days before the

Crucifixion (in the period we mark as Lent). Therefore, this is something to do during Lent – to give the Widow's Large Mite.

Lavish Love

The second act of extreme devotion happened when Jesus was invited to dinner in the home of "Simon, the leper". Simon couldn't have been a leper at the time, or he would have been ostracised and excluded from all social contact. Presumably, he was healed by Jesus. Lazarus was invited because he was a celebrity because Jesus had brought him back to life. While his sister Martha was serving, his second sister Mary slipped into the dining room, knelt where Jesus was reclining and poured a whole pound of very costly fragrant oil on His feet and then wiped them with her hair. It was an act of total recklessness: "wasting" (that's what people said) what was extremely precious and not caring for her own reputation by displaying her affection for Jesus so publicly, physically, and shamelessly.

The disciples were indignant and discussed the wastefulness (Matt. 14:4), led, no doubt, by Judas, who was more interested in collecting funds to dip into (Jn. 12:4-5). All said that the oil could have been sold and the money from the sale spent on the needy poor and all of them scolded

her for her callousness (Matt. 14:5). Jesus told them to let her be and to regard her act as one of preparing His body for burial (Jn. 12:7). He said that if they were really concerned about the poor, they would have opportunities in plenty to show their concern, but He Himself was not going to be around to be shown love (Matt. 14:7).

Jesus honoured Mary. He declared that her act of devotion would be legendary and included in the annals of the gospel story (v.9).

Outpouring of Gratitude

Mary, however, was not the first one to anoint Jesus' feet with expensive oil. There was another woman, and it is quite possible that Mary thought that it was neat way to show her feelings for Jesus by imitating the woman. The other woman was an outcast – a despised prostitute. All the moral people who witnessed her weeping at Jesus' feet, wetting them with her tears, wiping them with her loosened hair, kissing them and anointing them with costly perfume, could only think that Jesus wasn't much of a holy man since He was allowing a prostitute to shower love on Him. Their shrivelled souls could not appreciate the fact that one they considered a sinner – a terrible one – had been drawn to holiness and kindness. They did not take note that

they themselves had failed to touch anyone or bring them close to God like Jesus had.

Jesus took issue with His host for not having given Him the honour due to a guest – just the standard courtesies of having feet washed and being welcomed with warmth. He then pointed out that the woman, whom His host regarded as unworthy, had in fact made up for all the host's lapses and failures. Jesus said that the difference was that she really appreciated being forgiven. She had sinned much, but she knew that she was forgiven and that's all she cared about (Lk.7:40-50).

So, if you really want to keep Lent, it is no time to be practical and careful (read, calculating) and to hold back. It is the time to go crazy for Jesus – to become a fool for Christ (1 Cor. 4:10), a fanatic, an extremist. Lent is for crazies.



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Introduction: The Great Commission from our Lord commands us to Go and Make Disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything, He commanded us (Matthew 20:19-20). As we reach all nations (ethne), in this article, we want to look at the ministry to the Dalits in our nation.

The term

Though government order has notified their departments to use SC and ST (scheduled caste and scheduled tribe) instead of “Dalit”, most of the Dalit authors insist on using the word as it best describes their struggle. So, we will also use the word in this article.

Dalit focus

In our ministry, while we have tried to reach all people, the major focus in the last 20 years has been the suffering communities. However, this transition was not easy for me.

Even though I come from Dalit background, I really wondered if it was necessary to focus on one particular group, if God Himself wanted us to do that. Shouldn't we reach all people? Or shouldn't we focus on people high up in society like many early missionaries did?

Whenever I face major crisis like this in my life, I read through the whole Bible again to see what God's heart is on a particular issue. When I did that, I was shocked to see the heart of God for the suffering people. Numerous commands in the Old and the New Testament related to aliens, strangers, poor, orphans and widows. James even defined the religion as looking after orphans and widows. I had missed the heart of God for the suffering. Often, we don't see the truths in the Bible if we are not searching for it. So, I thank God for the body of Christ focusing on variety of people in our nation including the Dalit people groups.

The Need

God created man and woman free, but man has made man his slave and they don't even have access to their daily basic needs, let alone security, protection, and good future for their children. Less than 10% hold 90% of the wealth, power, and privileges. Now, this is true in most nations of the world as far as wealth is concerned but the system does not make it difficult for others to reach to the top. But in case of Dalits, this is not possible, unless someone helps them. In 2004, I was introduced to the Musahar people in Bihar. I was so sorry to hear a people group was called "rat-eaters." We had one daymeeting with 35 Musahar leaders in Patna. I could not believe the atrocities they were describing. ETV news reporter in the meeting told us that according to their survey, 90% all girls kidnapped in Bihar for prostitution were from this one community. They also said that one will never see a grey-haired man, because hardly any Musahar lived beyond the age 45! In summer months, their children follow cow or buffalo to collect cow-dung, take it home and wash it to find some undigested grain, to eat and survive. Most of them are landless. And, there are many people groups in our nation in similar condition.

Mission

How can we help the downtrodden communities to experience life as God meant it for them?

1. Identity: It is sad that when

Dalits come to Christ, church often tells them not to identify themselves as Dalits. In Christ there is no high or low, but all are equal before Christ. This is true, but this has also made their friends and relatives to think, once you become Christian, you leave us and identify with the high caste. This burned the natural bridges, they had to exalt Christ before their families and community. While God forgave the sins of Israel, He did not want them to ever forget where they had come from. Isaiah reminded Israel to remember from the quarry from which they were mined (Isaiah 51:1). If 70% of Christians in India are from Dalit background, it is important to encourage believers to identify with these people so that they can see the life of Christ in them. In fact, all of us need to follow our Lord Jesus and identified with those who suffer.

2. Empowerment: Those who are at the lowest rung of society will need some support to come out of poverty and oppression. Education is the greatest need for the most part, along with some economic and skill development training programs. Most agencies have learned the hard way, that it is best to ask them what their needs are, and then come along with them to help them instead of deciding their need ourselves. Our Lord asked the blind man what He could do for him, though the whole crowd knew his need (Mark 10:51). For Jesus, it was important to ask him and hear from him.

3. Human rights: While we do not believe in human ways to fight, the laws of our nations are good and constitution still very strong. It is important to educate people to know their rights and claim them for their protection and empowerment. So much literature is produced by their own writers, but not many are aware of it. For this, we ourselves have to be aware of these laws and regulations. EFI and several other groups regularly hold seminars to help Christian leaders to be equipped to help others.

4. Partnership: It is important to connect with community leaders and help them to understand that no one from outside can change their condition. They must work together to make this possible. We can only guide, assist, support and encourage. As Peter and John helped the man (Acts 3) to get up, but he had to try to stand up and walk.

5. Learning attitude: While the church is able to help Dalits, they have also so much to give to the church. I believe no one can help us how to reach the unreached like the unreached themselves. If you don't understand, ask. They have so much to teach us. One Dalit scholar once told me, "Moses, when you preach to our people, don't start from Matthew one, but from Genesis one. Before our people hear God sent His Son, they need to know God created them. That is an incredible good news for them." I would not have known that

by reading any mission manual or books!

6. Unconditional work: What if no one responds to our service? Many find this difficult. But our attitude needs to be like our heavenly Father who gives rain and sunshine to the good and the bad (Matthew 5:45). He is good to all so that some will recognize His goodness and follow Him, though most may not. When people find you have an ulterior motive in helping them, you often lose the impact of your hard work. On the other hand, Christlike life and service is not easy to ignore for a long time.

Criticisms

While the need and the possibilities are great, we need to address some criticisms that a mission will face if they consider getting involved in Dalit empowerment.

1. Easy task: "Some say you do this because it is easy to do." No one should do any work of God because it is easy. We must seek the will and direction of God in all we do. Otherwise, it would become a man's work and not God's. On the other hand, generally it is easier to help those who recognize their need for help. Often those who have everything, tend to be blind to their needs or too proud to accept it. But those who have suffered, broken by life's circumstances, are generally open to accept their need for assistance. This lack is not just of

roti, kapada aur makaan, but also of love, dignity, respect, and equal opportunity for those who are made in the image of God. Philip Yancey has rightly said, "As I travel, I have observed a pattern, a strange historical phenomenon of God "moving" geographically from the Middle East to Europe, to North America, to the developing world. My theory is this: God goes where He's wanted."

2. Some critics say, Christians help the poor because they are illiterate, ignorant and unable to make decision for themselves. But this is their hypocrisy. If illiterate and ignorant know how to bring up a family, provide for them and even vote for their politicians, why can't they decide what is good for their daily lives?

3. Others blame missions of using social services and even the spiritual blessings to deceive the poor with a sole motive of converting them. But the numbers don't prove their point. 40% of Indians live below poverty line (defined by those who can't get two meals a day). Government record of 1984 show that 33% of the social work in India, is done by 3% Christians. A tiny community has so enormous output in our nation, so that next to the government, the Indian church is the largest provider of social service in India. If this service is really to convert people, 40%, or 30% of Indians should become Christians in India. If I get

my bread and water, who cares about the religion? But the census figures show that Christians are not after that kind of conversions. In fact, from 3% Christians in last the last century, we are steadily decreasing in number, to 2.29% presently. On the other hand, Census reports Muslims have doubled in their population, from 7% at the independence to over 14% now. And still Christians are the main target for the conspiracy of conversion!

Learning from our Lord, apostles and church history

1. Life of Jesus: Not many people who discuss this issue, have realized Jesus' own major focus on the poor and marginalized. The Nazareth manifesto He read before the people from Isaiah, contained four kinds of people – the poor, the prisoners, the blind, and the oppressed (Luke 4:18-19). The Father had sent Him, and the Spirit of God was upon Him to help these people. One of the major reasons for the opposition He faced was, because He was mostly eating and drinking with "sinners and tax collectors" (Luke 15:1). Humanly speaking, He would not have gone to the cross, if He had kept the company of the rich and famous. But He purposely went to the lowest of the low, the rejects of the society. When the rich man walked away after an excellent conversation, Jesus had to tell them how hard it was for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 19:24), though with

God nothing is impossible (Mt. 19:26). We don't know how many rich and famous came to Christ during His ministry, but by name we know only two – Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimthea, and both strangely remained secret believers until crucifixion! It is generally difficult for those to follow Jesus who have so much to lose in this world, compared to those who don't have much to lose.

2. Apostolic teaching: James warned the church against partiality, reminding them that it was the rich who persecuted the church, not the poor. Paul wrote to Corinthians, that not many who were wise, rich, and powerful have been called, but God has chosen the fools to shame the wise, powerless to shame the powerful, despised to shame the important (1 Corinthians 1:26-28).

3. Church history: Looking through church history, we see an incredible impact of the church on this world. Before Jesus came, there was no non-profit organization. There were no hospitals, hospice, school for the blind, disabled, and so on. Even now, except for the government and church, hardly anyone else runs leprosy centers. Church has done every possible thing under the sun to bless those who suffer. My grandparents believed in Jesus, but they also found school and hospital to serve their children. So, in the second generation only our family came out

of poverty, abuse and insult. This can be the story of numerous people of God in our nation.

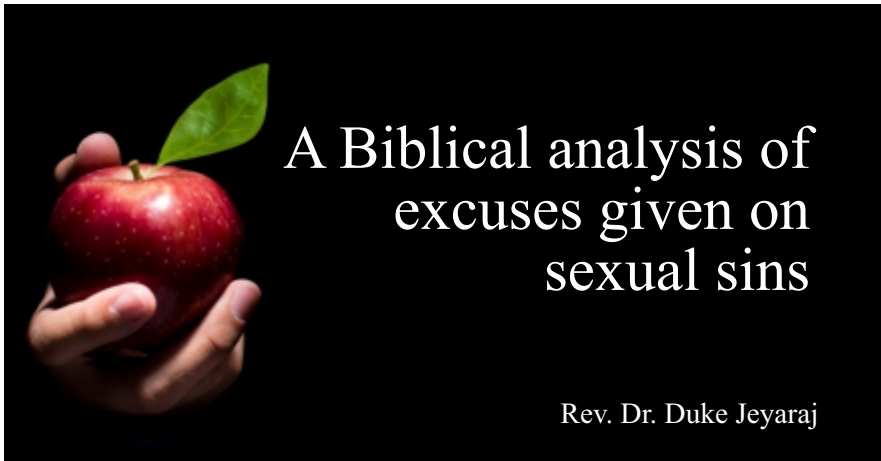
4. That is why the church needs to take care of those who come to Christ. A slave Christian is no good testimony for the Church. It is important to empower those who have come to faith along with those who are outside the faith.

Conclusion: The people of this world are watching to see what happens to those who follow Jesus. If their souls go to heaven (which is unseen by human eyes) but their bodies continue to suffer severe lack in this world, it does not speak great of our fellowship in Christ. But if they do improve in body, soul and spirit, nations of the world will come seeking for Him. May our Lord give us grace to make this possible.



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In what was the most widely read PDF read by believers world - over in recent times, these terribly shocking lines appeared: *'She reported that he made her pray with him to thank God for the "opportunity" they both received. She said he called her his "reward" for living a life of service to God, and he referenced the "godly men" in the Bible with more than one wife. She said he warned her not ever to speak out against him or she would be responsible for the "millions of souls" whose salvation would be lost if his reputation was damaged.'*

Those were lines supposedly used by a world-famous evangelist, allegedly, to convince a woman into having a sexual relationship with him. Let's unpack these lines in the light of the Bible using sound Bible interpretation principles.

NOT A GOD-GIVEN OPPORTUNITY

First of all, sexual activity outside marriage is not a God-given opportunity. Only the false teacher we read about in the Book of Revelation, could see sexual immorality as a God-given opportunity. These are the words of Christ – words of stern rebuke –about this woman preacher who was part of the church at Thyatira: 'Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching, she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So, I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely,

unless they repent of their ways. I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds' (Rev. 2:20-23 NIV). Jesus does not consider sexual immorality as an opportunity to thank God for, as this fallen preacher allegedly made it to be in his private conversations with the woman, he had a secret sexual relationship with. Instead, Jesus reserved the sternest words of judgement on the woman who was leading God's people into immorality by teaching a twisted theology.

NOT A GOD-SENT REWARD FOR DOING ONE'S MINISTRY DUTY

Second, sex outside of marriage, can never be a 'reward for living a life of service to God' (as this celebrated preacher allegedly made it to be). In fact, the Bible teaches, God need not even save us from sin, should he choose to do that. Hear the Lord God's words as recorded by Prophet Zephaniah: "Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the LORD's anger" (Zeph. 2:3, NIV). Don't miss the word 'perhaps' in the above

quoted verse. That tells us that even salvation of the soul cannot be demanded by anyone from the Lord God. If we are saved, it is because of God's sovereign will and demonstrated grace. If we are in the ministry, we have nothing to boast except the cross of Christ (Gal. 6:14). When this is the case, it is ridiculous to think sexual immorality can be a reward for living a life of service to God. On the contrary, the Bible teaches that the Lord will bring judgement upon those who pervert the grace of God into a license for immorality (Jude 3). The Bible proclaims a "woe" on such preachers (Jude 11). The Bible warns that the "blackest darkness" of hell is reserved for such ministers of the Gospel (Jude 13; Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30).

N O G O D - G I V E N P E R M I S S I O N F O R P O L Y G A M Y

Third, there is nothing in the Bible which can make us think that God would be okay with it, if we have more than one spouse (as this fallen evangelist supposedly argued to convince a woman to have a sexual relationship with him). This is not only a case of plain sexual immorality but also a clear-case of Scripture-twisting for personal convenience. Clear passages of the

Old Testament are enough to teach us that God's will for humankind is this: one man marries one woman and they both stay faithful to each other. We don't even need to go to the New Testament to grasp this. Genesis 2:24 says, "a" man (one man) "leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife" (not wives). Psalm 128:3 says, "Your wife (not wives) will be like a fruitful wine." Malachi 2:14 says, "The Lord is the witness between you and the wife (not wives) of your youth". Malachi 2:15 says, "Do not be unfaithful to the wife (not wives) of your youth". Let's get back to sound Bible interpretation! Let's get back to holy living!

NO CALL FOR SUPPRESSION OF NEWS ABOUT SECRET ADULTERY

This preacher apparently warned this woman with whom he had a secret sexual relationship this way: if ever she revealed to anyone that she has been having a secret sexual relationship with him, she would be responsible for the millions of souls whose salvation would be lost if his reputation is damaged. This supposed warning from this preacher is from the pit of hell! It is not Scriptural. The Bible teaches that we must not hide, but rather expose the deeds of darkness in Ephesians 5:11 where we read: 'Have nothing to

do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them'. I Timothy 5:17 calls for a double honour for church elders (preachers-teachers of the Word in our context) who do a good job. But if folks of the same tribe persisted in sin, they should be publicly "rebuked" (public rebuke is like double punishment) so that others who are thinking of living such a double life will "fear" a similar treatment. This can be gathered if we read just three verses below (in I Timothy 5:20)! Preachers can not only get to chose the privilege of double honour when they do well. They also must be ready to face the responsibility of receiving double punishment/discipline when it can be shown that they are guilty of living in persistent sin. This lesson cannot be missed if we read the Bible in context. We read everything else in context, instinctively. For example, if we hear the name, "Shah Rukh Khan", we now ask: "Shah Rukh Khan, the Bollywood actor? Or Shah Rukh Khan, the Tamil Nadu explosive batsmen who was bagged for Rs.5.25 Crore fee by Punjab Kings for the IPL Season 2021? In the same way, we must read the Bible also in context, lest we miss crucial truths.

So, none of the excuses this famous evangelist gave to carry out a secret

sexual affair stands the test of sound Scriptural interpretation. Let us choose to shun a hypocritical life which will take us to hell (did not Jesus warn the hypocrites of his day, the Pharisees this way: 'You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?' – Matt. 23:33). Let us choose the narrow road of holiness (Math. 7:13-14).

THIS KIND OF MINISTRY CANNOT LEAD TO LETHARGY

In a much-read Christianity Today article published on the same matter on September 29, 2020, the same preacher used a similar excuse to get into a sexting-phone sex relationship with another woman (allegedly). Here are those lines slightly altered to maintain the anonymity of the preacher and the person he supposedly preyed upon: “He (the same preacher referred to, above) stated so many times to me that the cost of ministry has been very high, that none of his time is his own, he has no privacy, no personhood left,” this woman wrote in 2016. She added that famous preacher-apologist assured her that the Lord understood what he had sacrificed and implied their sexual exchanges were God's way of rewarding him. The above paragraph implies that for this preacher, doing ministry left a

huge vacuum in his heart which he wanted to fill with a secret sexual relationship outside marriage. Ministry is not something we do! Ministry should be an overflow of our love for Jesus. Nothing more. Nothing less. That is why when Jesus chose his disciples, he mentioned “being with him”, before he mentioned “preaching about him” (Mark 3:14). Let's get back to falling in love with Jesus all over again! And when we do that – ministry will be a pleasure, and never a “pressure” for which we need find a sinful sexual release which will only make the vacuum in the heart even more voluminous.



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Christ Lives in Me

Bible Passage: Galatians 2:14-21

Theme Verse: Vs. 20. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Rev. Dr. Samuel Richmond Saxena

Once a Saturday before Palm Sunday, the Churches were taking out an Easter procession in one of the cities in India. Tableaus were well decorated, depicting Jesus' suffering, crucifixion, death, and resurrection. On every tableau, there were Bible verses which displayed Jesus as the living Lord. People of different beliefs, who were watching the procession, wanted to see 'the Living Christ' in reality. Some of them asked, "if Jesus is alive, then where is He?" In a real sense, it is difficult to show Jesus, but as Christians, we are called to display His life through our lives which is enough for people to know Him. People should see Christ in us. In the above verse, Paul is showing his closeness with Jesus to the extent that he shared His crucifixion. At one point in time, Paul tells the

Corinthian church, "*imitate me as I imitate Christ*" (1 Corinth. 11:1). Paul conveys to the believers that the death of the Savior does not give us the liberty to live whatever lives we wish, but our Savior died so that He might be able to live His life in us. This famous verse of Paul has transformed the lives of many people by giving them a new identity as true Christians.

When Paul writes that, "*I have been crucified with Christ*" and "*no longer I who live,*" it means, in Christ, we have become a new being. All our old habits are now crucified with Him. Our pride, status, background, intellect, experience, and wealth are now crucified with Christ. 'I' is dead and Christ is resurrected. In our new being, 'I' is replaced with 'Christ' who is living

and active. Now, as a believer, I'm neither under my own self, nor under the law, but truly governed by Christ who first loved me and gave Himself for me on the cross of Calvary. Our total submission to His love and sacrifice will enable us to become a new humanity. In Romans 6, Paul conveys that, all who have been baptized in Christ Jesus, participate in His death, as well as in His resurrection and, thereafter, by faith, we are permanently truly united with Him. When we die with Him, we are freed from our old self and are born again. Paul had both experiences: life before Christ and life after Christ. With this new experience, Paul is encouraging the Church to put off the old self and put on, Jesus Christ. C.S. Lewis once said, *"The Church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time."*

Secondly, when Paul writes, "Christ lives in me," it means that, the ultimate desire of God is to dwell in us through His Son. In other words, we become His dwelling place. If people are looking for Christ, then they should visit us. We should become the mediator to connect Christ with the world. The world

refers to those people, who are suffering, are lonely, depressed, addicted, frustrated, wayward, without hope, restless and those who are on the verge of ending their lives. When lost sinners repent, they not only get saved, but their bodies become the temple of the Holy Spirit. In John 14:23, *Jesus said, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them." When he dwells in us, then we experience His joy which is beyond our imagination.*

Dr. Charles Weigle composed the favorite, "No One Ever Cared for Me Like Jesus." One day, he visited Pasadena, California. Early that morning, he had an opportunity to walk through some of the famous rose gardens when the full fragrance of the flowers filled the air. Later in the day, he arrived at the hotel where a Bible conference was being held. As he took his seat, a man turned to him and said, "Dr. Weigle, I know where you've been. You toured one of our lovely gardens, for I can smell the pleasing aroma on your clothing." "My prayer is that I may walk so closely with the Lord that the fragrance of His grace will pervade my being. I want them to know by my words, actions, and songs that I have been with Jesus." Once the

Triune God dwells in us, then our lives become holy and we are not expected to live an unworthy life. Our repentance leads to submission where we invite Jesus to have fellowship, not just for a moment, but forever. No matter how unspiritual an assembly may become, Christ will always honor those who belong to Him, if they are faithful to His Word.

Someone has said that the Gospel in the first century was carried by a good system. It was called “the teleperson system”, and it truly got results; better than we do today with our telephones, televisions. The woman of Samaria carried the Gospel after her meeting with Christ by the teleperson system. It is said that, “*many of the Samaritans ... believed on Him for the saying of the woman*” (John 4:39). In the journey of faith, believers are called to witness about Christ. Many times, we proclaim Christ through our words, but it is very necessary to reveal Him through our deeds also. Francis of Assisi once said, “Preach the Gospel at all times. When necessary, use words.” According to Paul, we are the living letters (2 Corinth. 3:2), as well as the aroma of Christ (2 Corinth. 2:15). People should read His Gospel in us. We should not be ashamed of sharing

about Jesus to the world. If today, we deny Him publicly through our lifestyle, then on the Day of Judgment, Jesus will also deny us. While writing his will, Patrick Henry said, “I have now disposed of all my property to my family. There is one thing more I wish I could give them and that is faith in Jesus Christ. If they had that and I had not given them one shilling, they would have been rich: and if they had not that, and I had given them all the world, they would be poor indeed.”

“The great secret of abiding in Christ is the deep conviction that we are nothing, and He is everything.” Andrew Murray



Rev. Dr. Samuel Richmond Saxena
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The Samaritan Woman: Special in every way

Mrs. Sonia Daniel



While we have all read time and again about the incredible and strong women of faith in the Bible, there are other women, less spoken about, who have always intrigued me.

The conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman is one such fascinating incident, that astounds me. We desire and strive to be in league with the powerful and righteous women but be wary and distance ourselves from women like the 'Samaritan woman'.

The essence of this conversation at the well, is Jesus' connection and his will to reach out to the broken and the unwelcomed. The very first thing that captured my attention as we read through the conversation was, the transparency and honesty of the Samaritan woman.

7 When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" 8 (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

She could have just fetched the water and given it to Jesus to quench his thirst and gone her way, without revealing her real identity. Rather, she told Jesus about herself being a 'samaritan', without any shame and in full honesty, not disguising but being transparent.

The Samaritan woman teaches us to accept ourselves the way we are, and

not try to imitate or guise ourselves in order to be accepted by others. Many a times, in order to be accepted by the society, we try to match up with others, thereby concealing or masking our real selves.

In a world, where a person is judged and looked up to, on the basis of the people they are associated with, it takes a lot of courage to accept and be confident of our real identity. Staying grounded and being confident of our real selves is of utmost importance.

11 "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? 12 Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?"

Daring enough to question ! Again, when Jesus told her about the 'living water', she did not just listen and remain quiet, but she questioned him.

In order to remain in the good books of someone, we try to go with the flow and refrain from raising critical questions. It takes wisdom and discernment to ask questions. The Samaritan woman observed that Jesus did not have any vessel on him,

so in her wisdom, she did not fear to ask him, as to how he would draw the 'living water'.

Using wisdom and the power of discernment, we should be wise enough to assess the situation and raise pertinent questions wherever required. There is all probability that they may go unanswered, yet, ask! While you may not receive an answer, you will have jolted the conscience of the person to whom the question has been raised to.

17 "I have no husband," she replied.

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband.

18 The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

Yet again, she amazes me by speaking the truth! Taking ownership of her haywire life, she clearly states that she had no husband, for she had married five times and the one she was living with, was not her husband.

Anyone else would have ridiculed her, rebuked her and insulted her. But Jesus, appreciated her truthfulness in acknowledging this fact. Do we, like the Samaritan

woman, display such courage and acknowledge our misdeeds / mistakes?

He did not condemn her but in all grace, touched her heart and the loneliness she felt. The love and grace he demonstrated is almost similar to him saving the adulterous woman from being stoned by the riotous crowd.

19 “Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. 20 Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”.....

25 The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”

26 Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.”

Her faith that when the Messiah comes, he will explain everything, revealed her belief in the Lord. Jesus' revelation to her that He was the Messiah explains that he can reveal himself to anyone and use anyone, all because of his grace and mercy. He showed his grace to the Samaritan woman and forgave her,

she, on the other hand, witnessed a renewal of spirit.

The International Women's day is celebrated with full zeal, every 8th March. Women in the highest ranks and with great achievements are felicitated and spoken about. This women's day let us be willing to reach out to those women, who are broken in spirit and do our bit to accept them and empower them to regain their dignity.

Let us build the women of today by teaching them to accept themselves the way they are, to use their wisdom to question wherever required, and to own up to their mistakes in full honesty and transparency.

Every woman is special, the Samaritan Woman too!



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In March 2020, the late Ravi Zacharias was diagnosed with a malignant and rare cancer in his spine, and on 19 May 2020, he died at his home in Atlanta at the age of 74. He was a keen apologist and touched many lives through his ministry. However, since his death reports have been circulating and are being passed around about his sexual misconduct. I learnt about it quite early, soon after the first allegation was made in 2017. While denying that anything inappropriate had happened, there was a financial settlement.

I kept it to myself, not even telling my wife about the report that had surfaced. However, after Ravi's death more and more allegations started to pour in, and so the Ravi Zacharias International Ministries decided to have a thorough,

independent investigation done with the intention to clear Ravi's name. Instead, there has been confirmation that those who accused him were not lying. The news of this scandal has snowballed into an avalanche.

What follows is not an exoneration of what Ravi did. It was sinful. It was not right. Poor women were exploited and abused.

The question is, how are we to view Ravi's ministry? Does everything he preached and wrote stand discredited because of his moral failures?

Clay feet Saint

The scandal proves that Ravi was not sinless. Who is? I know, I am not.

Scripture records the last surviving apostle John confessing, after long years of hard ministry, "If we say that

we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 Jn. 1:8, NASB).

When the prophet Isaiah saw a vision of God in His glory, his immediate reaction was, “Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (Isa. 6:5). There’s no way anyone catching a vision of God can congratulate himself or herself for being worthy enough (or worthier than others) to be granted the privileged revelation. Instead of feeling close to God, like Isaiah the person perceives that he or she is actually closer to sinful people than to God.

The apostles, when addressing the ordinary members of churches, called them “saints”. That included the lot at Corinth. The church there was really bad. Disunity was rampant (1 Cor. 1:10-3:23), incest didn’t trouble them (5:1-2), litigating to deprive and crush others was common (6:1-8), idolatrous practices weakened the church (8:1-13; 10:14-22), spiritual rites and gifts were used as a means to humiliate others (11:17-14:40) and heresy was prevalent (15:12). Yet Paul referred to them as “those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints” (1:2). Had Paul lost his

mind? Did he have no sense of propriety?

When people put their faith in Christ and trust Him to redeem them, indeed they are justified and sanctified. They are, of course, not saints of the kind that are carved in marble and idolised in cathedrals and churches. They are saints with feet of clay. Ravi was such a saint – one with feet of clay camouflaged in branded footwear. Inspired Ministry

To change the metaphor, Ravi was a jar of clay with Jesus treasured in him (2 Cor. 4:7). There is no denying that Ravi served the Lord. He was inspired and moved by the Holy Spirit, even though he did remain sinful and imperfect.

Remember Samson? He was chosen by God. He was filled with the Spirit of God. But from the time he reached maturity he was a womanizer, and even when he was caught in sin, the Spirit didn’t leave him (Judg. 15:14). The Lord left him only his head was shaved and he ceased to be a nazirite (16:20). And then, at the very end, he called on God to empower him again and still the Lord heard him (vv.28-30).

Paul and Barnabas were serving the Lord together very successfully, but fought so bitterly that they separated (Acts 15:39) and never worked together after that. But the Holy

Spirit never stopped using them. I'm guilty of this. I fought with one who was like a son in the ministry.

Peter had a compromising streak in him (Gal.2:11-14), that was reminiscent of his denial of Christ (Mk. 14:66-72). He too continued to serve the Lord. Many is the time I have compromised fearfully.

No, no one has served the Lord sinlessly, but “the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:29). As our Lord said, “when you have done everything that was assigned and commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy servants [undeserving of praise or a reward, for we have not gone beyond our obligation]; we have merely done what we ought to do’” (Lk. 17:10, Amplified Bible).

The only time I heard Ravi in person was when he was a college student taking part in a preaching contest at the Youth For Christ sponsored Asian Youth Congress held at Hyderabad in 1965. Even at that early age, he manifested the brilliance of a sharp mind and delivered a powerful message. The last time I bought a couple of Ravi's books was after I had been alerted to the doubtfulness of his character. I bought them because his writings were inspired in spite of his flawed personality.

How People Contribute to Failure

Believers are to blame for what happened. We have the tendency to idolise people and those we put up on a pedestal can't help lapping it all up. They begin to think of themselves as above all others. They regard themselves as exceptions – exceptions to all rules. They do believe that the rules have to be different in their case because they are so special.

When will we learn that we cannot have celebrities in the Kingdom of God?

When Jesus took Peter, James and John to the mountaintop meeting with Moses and Elijah, Peter was so awed by the ancient heroes of Judaism, that he excitedly suggested, “Let's just stay here on the mountain and we'll make three tents – one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” He clubbed the old heroes with the Lord. Then God thundered, “This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!” (Matt. 17:5), meaning, “Moses and Elijah cannot be classified with Jesus. Only Jesus is to be obeyed.”

We have to stop all hero-worship. It's not good for them. It's not good for us.

Judgement

In reaction to what has happened, there has been bitterness, anger,

disgust, disappointment and all the other shades of judgement. God's Word says, "Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and stand he will, for the Lord is able to make him stand" (Rom. 14:4). God alone is the judge.

Our problem is that we tend to grade sins. Subconsciously we think of some sins as somewhat excusable, and others as unforgivable. In our view, the worst sins are related to sexual immorality.

Our Lord equated sinful thoughts to the very acts of sin (Matt. 5: 21-32). Ouch! Woe is me. I am a sinful man.

To God, all sin is equally sinful. All are acts of rebellion: "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness" (1 Jn. 3:4). When we sin, no matter what it is that we are guilty of, it boils down to just one thing: we have broken God's law. "For whoever keeps the entire law, yet fails in one point, is guilty of breaking it all" (Jas. 2:10).

Note that the heroes of the faith include the prostitute Rahab, David who committed adultery and then committed murder to cover up the adultery, Samson who consorted with at least three women who didn't worship God, and Gideon who promoted idol worship after triumphing over enemies (Heb.

11:31-32). Isn't that incredible?

"God is love" (1 Jn. 4:8). His love is amazing. He loved us while we were still sinners. He sacrificed His own beloved Son for the sake of saving humans who were not one bit worth redeeming (Rom.5:6-8). Though Peter was talking about the kind of love we ourselves should have, he did say that "love covers over a multitude of sins" (1 Pet. 4:8). How much more that would be true of God's love for people.

From the time he was diagnosed with cancer to the time of his death, Ravi was totally confined. He would have been aware that the end was coming. I am a great believer in death bed conversions. After all, there was Samson of Old Testament fame, and the repentant thief on the cross is part of the gospel itself (Lk. 23:39-43).



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The Holy Spirit: Sent from Heaven (1Peter 1:12)

I. SPEAKING IN TONGUES

There are those who say that the speaking in tongues is the sign of the Baptism of the Holy

Spirit. That is, those who have not spoken in tongues, are not baptized with the Holy Spirit. I knew one Pastor who claimed that those who have not spoken in tongues, are not even born again. Such people shake the faith of the new believers. The new believers wonder whether they are born again or not. But as I understand, the gift of speaking in tongues is not the evidence of the Baptism with the Holy Spirit. Because not everyone speaks in tongues. 1 Corinthians 12:29,30 says, “Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all do miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But desire the greater gifts.” The obvious answer to all these questions is an emphatic 'No.'

All are not apostles. All are not prophets. All are not teachers. All do not do miracles. All do not have the gift of healing. All do not speak in tongues. All do not interpret. One person tried to twist this verse in my presence. He said, “No. All are not, and all do not. But they should.” But that is not the natural import of these verses.

There are those who say that the speaking in the tongues is the basic gift. It opens the door for other gifts to follow. Some claim that when we pray in tongues, Satan cannot intercept it as he does not know what we are praying for. Our prayers reach heaven directly and quickly. Some say that the speaking in tongues is the evidence of the fullness of the Holy Spirit. But out of the nine references to the fullness of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts, eight do not mention speaking in tongues:

1. "Then they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them" (Acts 2:4). Here, the speaking in tongues is mentioned. But notice the other eight; 2. "Then Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and said to them..." (Acts 4:8); 3. "Brothers and sisters, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we can appoint to this duty" (Acts 6:3); 4. "This proposal pleased the whole company. So they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit..." (Acts 6:5); 5. "Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven. He saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55); 6. 'Ananias went and entered the house. He placed his hands on him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road you were traveling, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 9:17); 7. "...for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith" (Acts 11:24); 8. "But Saul—also called Paul—filled with the Holy Spirit, stared straight at Elymas and said..." (Acts 13:9); 9. "And the disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit" (Acts 13:52). It is interesting to note what happened in each stance of the fullness of the Holy Spirit. They spoke intelligible words,

words which humans could understand.

2. There are three possible types (sources) of tongues. Genuine tongues given by the Holy Spirit, as we see in Acts 2:1-4, "When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance." Also, in Acts 19:5-7 "On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. There were about twelve men in all."

Paul spoke in tongues more than anyone else. But he refrained from speaking in tongues in the church because he wanted all to understand him. He said, "I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue." It is nowhere stated that our Lord ever spoke in tongues. Does it mean that he was not filled with the Holy Spirit? It is said in Luke 10: "In that

same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said....” Our Lord knew the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Our Lord knew the fullness and the leading of the Holy Spirit intimately. We read in Luke 4:1, “And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness.” He knew the power of the Holy Spirit upon him. We read in Luke 4:14, “And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee...” And yet, nowhere it is stated that he ever spoke in tongues. He might have but it's not stated. If speaking in tongues is so important then his speaking in tongues should have been mentioned.

Second possible source would be Satanic imitation of the gift of speaking in tongues. Whatever Moses did in the court of Pharaoh, the Egyptian magicians did the same. “Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers, and they, the magicians of Egypt, also did the same by their secret arts. For each man cast down his staff, and they became serpents” (Exodus 7:11). “But the magicians of Egypt did the same by their secret arts” (v.22). “But the magicians did the same by their secret arts and made frogs come up on the land of Egypt” (Exodus 8:7). Third possible source may be psychological or even physiological reaction. We repeat a word or a phrase so many times that our mind

loses control over what we are saying. Then, we begin to speak whatever gibberish comes in our mind. It can be also a learned behavior. English is not my mother tongue. But over the years, I have learned to speak and write English. Some seem to have memorized certain words and phrases which they keep on writing.

Genuine speaking in tongues is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit which he gives just as he determines/wills (not just as we determine/will). “All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills” (1Corinthians 12:11). There are four uses of this gift. First, praise and worship. “For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God” (1Corinthians 14:2). Second, personal edification. “The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself” (1Corinthians 14:4). Third, edification of the church. “What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret” (1Corinthians 14:26,27). Fourth, a sign to the unbelievers. “Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers (1Corinthians 14:22).

But the Scripture emphasizes the gift of prophecy over and above speaking in tongues. “Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy (1Corinthians 14:1). “Now, I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up” (v.5). “So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church” (v.12). Prophecy here does not mean telling the future but ministry of the word. It is not foretelling but forth telling.

Here are six guidelines for speaking in tongues: 1. We should not forbid anyone from speaking in tongues. “So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues (1Corinthians 14:39). Because there is genuine speaking in tongues; 2. We should use it publically only when there is someone to interpret. “If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God” (1Corinthians 14:27,28); 3. We should refrain from using it to impress others; 4. We should beware of manufacturing it

by working ourselves up to a frenzy emotion, saying the same word(s) for hours and hours, speaking whatever comes to our minds, etc. If we do so, we might end up in having something which is spurious or even Satanic; 5. We should neither demean those who do not speak in tongues, nor call demonic to those who do; 6. We should try to excel in those gifts which build the body of Christ, the church. “So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church”(1Corinthians 14:12).



Rev. Richard Masih

in New Delhi. He studied theology in All Nations Christian College, England. He served the Lord for 40 years with the Union of Evangelical Students of India and also authored several books in English. He is available for the ministry of the word in Hindi and English on invitation. He can be reached at Mobile: 9958747748 and richardmasih@gmail.com.

Choosing Life: India's Proposed Abortions Laws Fail to Protect Women and the Unborn Child



Ms. Anushree Bernard

The Lok Sabha in March last year passed the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill ('MTP Bill') and the Bill is due to come up for debate in the Rajya Sabha in the March 2021 session.

While, the MTP bill claims to protect the rights of women, it fails to consider critical issues that will undermine not only the right to life of women, but also the life of the unborn child.

Increased ceiling limit of up to 20 weeks will result in higher sex selective abortions:

By one sweeping amendment, the MTP Bill has increased the ceiling permitting abortions from 12 weeks to 20 weeks and in certain exceptional circumstances even up to 24 weeks.

In the existing Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971 (hereinafter 'the Act'), abortions exceeding 12 weeks were only permissible under certain conditions, requiring two registered medical practitioners to give assent to it.

No rationale has been provided in the MTP Bill for increasing the current ceiling limit of 12 weeks. When our country suffers from a deplorable child sex ratio of 918 girls for every 1000 boys, the MTP Bill's intent to raise the limit to 20 weeks without considering the huge repercussions that will follow for girl children in India is outrageous. Moreover, in about 67 countries, the most common gestational limit for abortions is 12 weeks.

According to the 'State of the World's

Children 2007' Report by UNICEF, it is estimated that 7000 girls are aborted every day in India, reflecting the immense son preference and daughter aversion prevalent in many parts of the country. If the rigorous provisions of the existing Act have failed to stem the rising cases of sex selective abortions, the havoc that increasing the ceiling limit to 20 weeks would cause is unimaginable.

The extension of the ceiling to 24 weeks for certain categories of women is also unprecedented. The MTP Bill has failed to consider that only 7 countries in the world allow abortions beyond 20 weeks.

Foetal Abnormality

One of the primary reasons for this MTP Bill is allegedly the need for abortions in the instance of foetal abnormality. The MTP Bill call for the setting up of state level Medical Boards to decide if a pregnancy may be terminated after 24 weeks in cases of substantial foetal abnormalities. However, the MTP Bill fails to define what substantial foetal abnormalities are and how they can be classified.

For instance, where doctors identify the baby has having down syndrome, mothers are routinely offered an abortion as per the Guidance Note on

Down Syndrome issued by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India.

According, to Down syndrome federation of India, Down syndrome occurs in approximately 1 of 830 live births. A person with Down syndrome in good health will on average live to age 55 or beyond.

In many countries, Down Syndrome has been eradicated not due to medical breakthroughs but simply by abortions. Sadly, this MTP Bill if passed will take India down a similar path.

Poor healthcare infrastructure does not support increased abortions:

Furthermore, by extending the upper limit for an abortion, the MTP Bill will put many women into perilous situation. The MTP Bill in its present form does not specify what is the criteria which will permit a woman to have an abortion between 20 and 24 weeks.

According to Lancet Global Health Report, 15.6 million abortions occurred in India in 2015 alone, between the age group of 15-49 years. Healthcare facilities have a pivotal role to play especially in abortion services, by providing

quality care to women who undergo abortion. The MTP Amendment Bill does not address the critical issue of the necessity of adequate healthcare facilities for pregnant women who undergo such late-term abortions.

Research reveals an 80 percent shortfall of obstetricians and gynaecologists in most States and UTs especially in rural areas. The increased ceiling limit will put an enormous burden on the already frail healthcare system. Lack of easy access to quality healthcare services for a safe abortion and recovery post-abortion, would cause severe damage to the health of women.

Abortion must not be treated as a form of contraceptive due to the impact it has on the health of a woman. Unsafe abortions were the third leading cause of maternal deaths in India. In addition, unsafe abortions can result in serious infection, future infertility, sepsis, bowel injury, internal injuries, and even death, according to a article in The Lancet, a medical journal in January 2018

Right of the foetus to be born

Indian law recognises the worth and inherent dignity of the unborn child. For instance, statutes like the Transfer of Property Act, 1882 and the Hindu Succession Act, 1956

recognize and mention the unborn and have defined it to be a legal person by fiction.

Further, Section 315 of the Indian Penal Code also recognises and affords protection to the unborn foetus by punishing any act done before the birth of the child with the intention to prevent the child from being born alive with imprisonment up to 10 years.

The viability of the foetus is a crucial ingredient to restrict the termination of pregnancy up to only 20 weeks and not beyond that as provided for under the MTP Act and hence the ceiling of 20 weeks has been laid down under section 3(2) (b) of the MTP Act, as subsequent thereto, the unborn child is viable and can also survive outside the mother's body, under medical supervision.

Several reports and offer hope that a foetus is viable after 20 weeks. For instance, in January 2021, media reported that a baby girl born at 23 weeks of gestation in Andhra Pradesh was nursed for 170 days in a neonate intensive care unit and survived.

Conclusion

Both sides of the debates pit the right of the foetus against the right of the mother. One life cannot trump the other. No foetus can survive without the mother choosing to take all

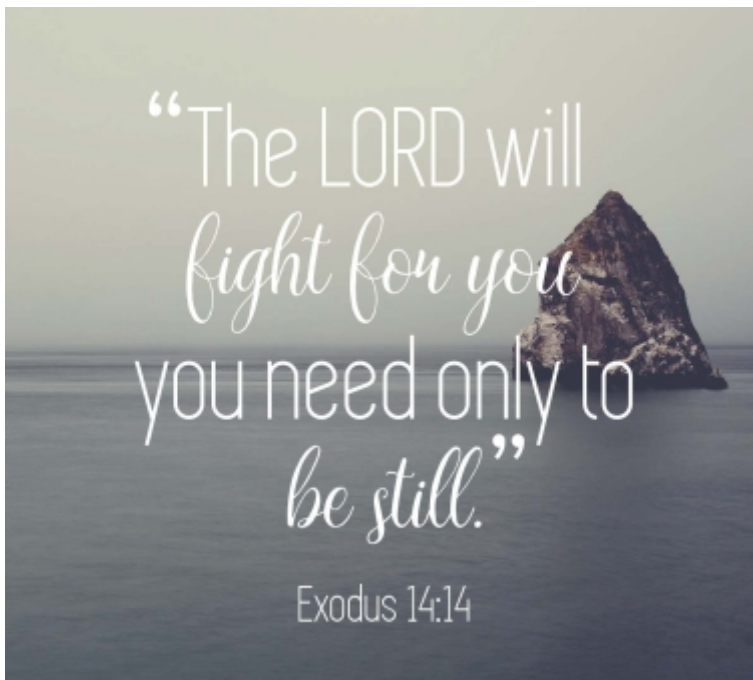
necessary precautions to care for the child in her womb.

Women should not be forced to face such a difficult choice. By failing to address the real issues, such laws offer women only a quick fix solution, often at the expense of women itself. Women instead require better protection so that they have more agency in their marriages and sexual relations. Women need safe spaces and better support while facing unwanted pregnancies. As a society we must work to provide long lasting solutions not merely plastering over the cracks. Life is precious and we must do all we can to protect it.



Ms. Anushree Bernard

a lawyer practising in Delhi and serves as legal counsel of ADF India. She can be contacted at askme@adfindia.org. Visit <https://vanishinggirls.in/> for more details about the Vanishing Girls Campaign.



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- Last date for submission of application form is on 31st May, 2021

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THE BIBLE SOCIETY OF INDIA invites applications from residents of Maharashtra/Goa who are dynamic, result oriented, enterprising and committed to the Bible Cause for the post of **AUXILIARY SECRETARY FOR THE BOMBAY AUXILIARY**. The applicant should be an ordained person from an established Church who should also have completed BD/M.Th. along with a secular University Degree from recognized and reputed Universities. He/She should have administrative experience in a senior position in Churches/Christian Organizations. Extensive tour of entire Maharashtra and Goa would be involved. Candidates should be between 40 and 50 years of age and fluent in Marathi, Konkani, Hindi and English. This post is in the salary scale of Rs. 10800-680-17600-760-29000-840-37400. Additional allowances like DA - 82% of basic, CCA – Rs. 1500/-, Medical – Rs. 1700/- and Children's Allowance - Rs. 1500/- per child for children upto the age of 21 years who are unmarried/unemployed will be paid. Residential accommodation and a vehicle for official use will also be provided. **Age/Salary/Qualification will be relaxed in deserving cases.**

Application on plain paper with detailed resume including age, education, training, experience, salary now drawing and expected, contact details, Church background etc., along with copies of certificates/testimonials, two reference letters and a passport size photograph should be mailed to the General Secretary, Bible Society of India, LOGOS, 206 Mahatma Gandhi Road, Bangalore 560 001 in a sealed envelope superscribing “Application for the post of Auxiliary Secretary, Bombay Auxiliary”, to reach him by March 31, 2021. **Those who are presently working with Churches/Christian Organizations should apply with the endorsement of the concerned Head of the Church/Organization only.** Selected candidates need to undergo a thorough medical examination at own cost in a hospital recommended by the BSI particularly to see if the appointees suffer from any pre-existent illness and whether she/he is fit to take up the position offered.

Form IV. (SEE Rule 18)

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I, Mr. Vijayesh Lal, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Date: March 1, 2021 Sd/-
Mr. Vijayesh Lal

Signature of Publisher

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To apply for this post, you can send your CV to **hr@twrindia.org** before **31st March 2021**.

Intercessory
Prayer
Points



MARCH 2021

1 MONDAY Thank God for the new month. Commit yourself to the Lord and allow Him to lead you throughout the month of March 2021.

2 TUESDAY Pray for farmers in our country today, that God would provide abundant rain for a good harvest this year. Pray for those who are struggling with huge debts that they would find hope in God. Continue to pray that the government would listen and provide the best solution for their needs.

3 WEDNESDAY Pray that believers would spend more time in self evaluation and reflection. Pray that there would be repentance and change of hearts during this Lent.

4 THURSDAY Pray for parents whose children are writing board exams. Pray that they would cautiously care and encourage their children with Christ's love during this difficult time.

5 FRIDAY Pray that all the Group

members, Life members and Individual members of Evangelical Fellowship of India would glorify God through words and deeds.

6 SATURDAY Pray that the Lord would give renewed strength and commitment to all the EFI staff at HO and different parts of the country. Pray for deep joy and peace as they serve God in their respective capacities.

7 SUNDAY Pray that every believer would trust God in difficult seasons of life and hold fast to Him. Pray for joyful corporate worship at Church physically or online today.

8 MONDAY International Women's Day. Continue to pray for women empowerment in our country. Pray for equality. Pray that women would be aware of and find their purpose in life. Pray for women who are in leadership, that they would serve with humility and compassion. Pray also for ability and strengthen to juggle multiple responsibilities.

9 TUESDAY Pray for students

under exam pressure. Pray that the Lord would protect them and plant hope in their hearts. Pray that God would replace hopelessness and anxiety with peace, comfort and hard work.

10 WEDNESDAY Pray for people who are struggling with their faith. Pray that the good Lord would reveal Himself to them at their level of understanding.

11 THURSDAY Pray for religious liberty in our country. Pray that every individual would have the freedom to worship without fear. Pray for strength and God's comfort for those persecuted because of their faith.

12 FRIDAY Continue to Pray for Covid-19 disease to stop spreading further. Pray for those who are infected and are recovering from Covid that the Lord would heal them both physically and spiritually.

13 SATURDAY Pray for the elderly people in your neighbourhood today. Pray that each one of them would be provided and cared for. Pray for compassionate heart for people who are in contact with them.

14 SUNDAY Pray for joyful worship and surrendered lives on the Lord's day. May the Lord give teachable hearts and willingness to obey His commands.

15 MONDAY Pray for the

emotional and physical strength of the children. Pray for safety and protection. Pray for diligence and hard work in studies. Above all, pray that they would be dependent on God and remain calm, composed and joyful.

16 TUESDAY Pray for all the Christian NGOs in your state. Pray for God's protection and guidance. Pray for transparency in their work so that everyone would see and praise God for their work. With the new FCRA rules, pray that they would be able to fulfill all the formalities on time.

17 WEDNESDAY Pray for EFI Children At Risk (EFICAR). Pray that they would tirelessly work to rescue, rebuild and restore the lives of children who were the victim of human trafficking. Pray for strength and wisdom as they carry out their work.

18 THURSDAY Pray for safety and protection of our country. Pray for peaceful relationship with our neighbouring countries.

19 FRIDAY Pray that you may live out the Gospel and share it with someone today. Pray for right words at the right time. Pray that the Holy Spirit would take the Word of God and work in the person's heart and mind and bring forth changes.

20 SATURDAY Let us pray for all the orphans in our country. May God

hear their cries and envelop them with his unconditional love. May we know God's heart and support the cause of the orphans.

21 SUNDAY International Day for Elimination of Racial discrimination. Pray for awareness. Pray for endurance. Pray for racial harmony as we enjoy unity in diversity. Pray that our hearts and minds be open to know and appreciate the similarities and differences of different people groups in our country.

22 MONDAY Continue to pray for EFI AIM magazine. Pray that many people would be reached as we have made it available on social media. Pray that people would draw strength from the articles published through AIM. Pray also for the writers' health to improve and be strengthened.

23 TUESDAY Continue to pray that God would heal our land and make us a source of blessing to people around us.

24 WEDNESDAY Pray that all the churches in India would observe this important day. Pray that everyone in the church would repent and draw near to God. Pray for revival in the church.

25 THURSDAY Continue to pursue personal holiness and close relationship with the Lord. Pray that

your life would be a good example of personal holiness.

26 FRIDAY Pray for Christian lawyers in our country who are actively involved in the well being of believers and their fundamental rights. Pray for courage as they give counsel or represent them in the courtrooms.

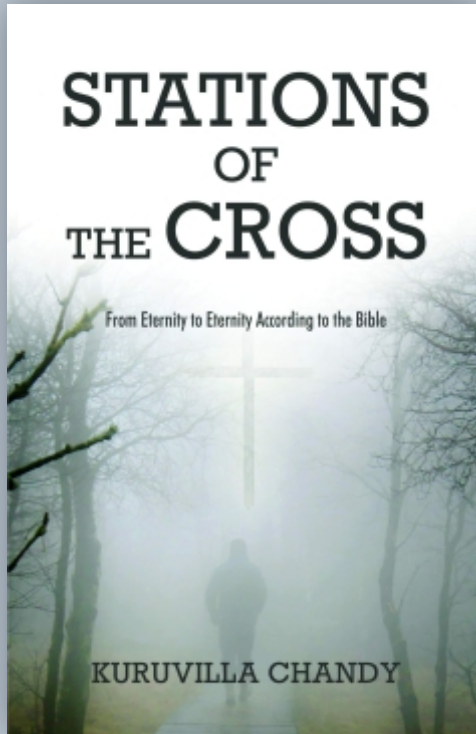
27 SATURDAY Pray for yourself that your love for the Lord would grow more. Pray that you may be a strong and active witness of God's love manifested in Christ.

8 SUNDAY Pray for all the Sunday School Teachers in your church that they may love the Word of God and pass it on to the children.

29 MONDAY Pray for your city today that the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ would shine bright and people may enjoy His abundant blessings. Pray that the presence of God would be felt by many.

30 TUESDAY Pray for your pastor as he/she prepares for Good Friday and Easter Sunday services. Pray that he/she would listen to God attentively and share the Word of God with clarity and authority.

31 WEDNESDAY Thank God for all his blessings through out the month of March 2021. Submit yourself to His care for the new month.



Lent is observed by Christians all over the world as a period for reflecting on the passion or sufferings of our Lord and His atoning death. Some Christian groups go through the exercise of marking the Stations of the Cross on Good Friday. This book on the Stations of the Cross view them as spanning from eternity to eternity – the first station being heaven and Christ's journey ending with His resurrection. In this exposition of the Stations of the Cross, the author attempts to turn the observance of the Stations of the Cross from being a tradition that is important only to some denominations into a tradition that Christian believers of all denominations could embrace. The book includes spiritual exercises to observe the Stations of the Cross on Good Friday, and the Stations of the Resurrection on Easter Sunday

The book is available
at the online Christian Store

<https://www.christianstore.in/stations-of-the-cross.html>

on Amazon

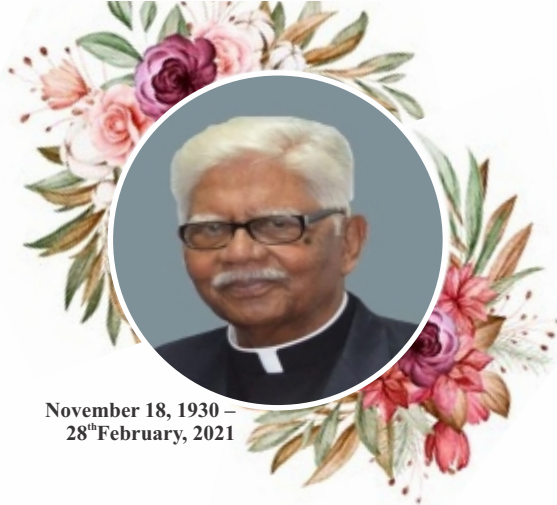
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November 18, 1930 –
28thFebruary, 2021

Rev. Dr. Samuel Theodore Kamaleson was born on November 18, 1930 in Vellore, Tamil Nadu.

He received a Bachelor of Veterinary Science degree from the University of Madras in 1957 and then went on to earn his Master of Divinity degree, a Master of Theology degree and a Doctor of Divinity degree in 1971 from Asbury Theological Seminary. He was also given a Doctor of Sacred Theology degree from Emory University in 1971.

He started serving the Lord as a pastor with the Methodist Church in Tamil Nadu and served from 1961 till 1968 and again from 1971 to 1974.

In 1974, he became a vice president at large for World Vision International, where he worked until 1996. He was also the founder President of Friends Missionary Prayer Band (FMPB).

Dr. Kamaleson travelled to many countries and encouraged Pastors and Christian leaders. His contribution in building God's kingdom is deeply appreciated. Beside teaching the Word of God Dr. Kamaleson loved to sing. He was a close friend of EFI.

Even as heaven rejoices, we feel a great loss. His inspirational teachings and melodious voice will be missed. Please pray for his bereaved family that the Lord's comfort be with them.



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