

EXHORTATIONS OF THE APOSTLES

(Epistles of the New Testament – A Study)

Fr T J Joshua

(Divyabodhanam Book Series: 11)

Statement

Dear ones,

By God's abundant grace, the first stage of Divyabodhanam program has concluded successfully. The preparation of ten books on our faith related topics itself is a good achievement.

The program that commenced only in 1984 had 49 centers associated with it. There were 130 women and 210 men who participated in this exercise. His Holiness Catholicose is distributing certificates on August 9, 1986 to those who have completed the course (10 subjects).

Now, we are coming to the second stage. Apart from accepting participants for the second batch of the preliminary stage, new courses are being formulated for those who have completed first stage.

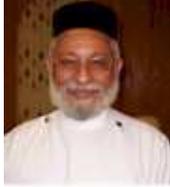
The target for the second stage too is to deepen the knowledge of church members in their understanding of faith. This would be useful equally for parents and youth possessing basic education. This process is a basic requirement for all Sunday school teachers.

What is being looked forward to is ten thousands of members completing this course within the next few years resulting in an all-round progress in the faith centered life of our people. Let these books be instrumental in Holy Spirit to experience the love of God that is expressed with the God coming down as a human in Christ. Let there be showering of Blessings from the Almighty to all of you.

Kottayam,

July 3, 1986

Dr Paulose Mar Gregoriose, President, Divyabodhanam



Fr T J Joshua, as a committed priest, has stamped his personality within the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church as also in the Diaspora successfully. He has attracted many to Christ through his preaching of the gospel. He has served the Orthodox Theological Seminary as its Vice Principal and Professor of New Testament with distinction for more than quarter of a century. He has been part and parcel of the various services of the Church as the Director General of Orthodox Sunday School Association of the East, Director of Divyabodhanam, Editorial Board Member of Malankara Sabha Magazine as also has been extending yeoman services and leadership within the Church and outside by leading classes, conferences, mediations, social activities and so on. As a writer par excellence, his books namely, **In the Holy Land, Prayers of St Paul, Towards the Light, From Water and Spirit, A Meditation on the Epistle to Ephesians, Study of the Epistle to Romans, Freedom in Christ, I was Sick, Face to Face with Death, Thoughts for Today** are all very popular.

Preface

What I am aiming at is to guide the readers through New Testament in two volumes. The first volume, TOWARDS THE LIGHT, was the very first study material for Divyabodhanam program. It is quite satisfying that the book was well taken by the Divyabodhanam participants as also other readers. The aim was to encourage and influence readers to learn New Testament more deeply.

What had been covered in 'TOWARDS THE LIGHT' were a general study on the four gospels and a specific treatment on the Book of Acts. The second volume titled 'EXHORTATIONS OF THE APOSTLES' deals with the remaining books in New Testament.

Almost one fourth of the New Testament is the Epistles of St Paul. The first two units deal with the Epistles and his thought processes. Out of his vast and wide thoughts, six aspects are chosen and are presented as six lessons in unit two. The third unit covers general Epistles and the Book of Revelations. In the fourth unit, we have the insights from New Testament on contemporary issues.

In general, what all exhortations are there from the Apostles are briefed in this volume. This volume is meant as a course material for those who have completed the stage one of the Divyabodhanam program and proceeding to the subsequent Diploma course. Let this book be useful for other readers as well.

Orthodox Seminary

Fr TJ Joshua

Kottayam

From the Publisher's Desk

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Unit 1

St Paul

Lesson 1

Cultural Background

Paul as a person, # Always, a man of controversies # Greco Roman Cultural Background # Jewish Influence

The position of St Paul is second to none in Church history. His thoughts and activities have been playing crucial role in the growth of Christian Church. His personality is a mixture of contrasts. One who is declaring himself as the biggest of all sinners, one though a Jew is becoming the Apostle of gentiles, one who is commencing his life as the hardest persecutor of Christians and ending up as the central person behind the growth and development of the Church: all these are put together in St Paul.

St Paul was always a controversial person. During the era of Apostles itself, there were people in the Church sharply criticizing and opposing him. They used to question his position in the Church and his authority. During the modern days, there are controversies rising in the Christian community among scholars. Dialogues are live as to which all epistles are truly of St Paul; there are differences of opinion about his cultural background also; there are some historians and theologians who place him exclusively as part of Greek culture whereas others place him as Jew in its totality.

To learn who St Paul is and to understand his thought processes, a clear idea about his cultural background is essential. For this, the ideologies and cultural aspects those would have had effects on him need to be identified.

Paul has been a person good enough to address all the three known cultures, actively interacting within the community. By birth and his religious education, he has been a Jew; by his deep knowledge of language and philosophy, he has been closely associated with Greek; by his citizenship, he was part and parcel of Roman culture. This indicates that he has never been under the influence of any one single culture among these.

Greek Cultural Background:

Paul was born and brought up in a town called Tarsus (Acts 21:39, 22:3.) This town was a main center of Greek culture and philosophy. Many Stoic philosophers were concentrated there. Their teachings were creating ripples in the town. Paul, who grew up in this town obviously got mingled with Greek culture and philosophy having assimilated them to a good extent. This assessment of St Paul became quite popular towards the end of 19th century and during early 20th century.

To win a Greek for Christ, Paul has been holding many ideas associated with Greek culture (1 Cor. 9:21).

- (a) St Paul has explained the clashes that occur between flesh and spirit (Romans 7); “For what our human nature wants is opposed to what the spirit wants, and what the spirit wants is opposed to what our human nature wants” (Galatians 5:17).
- (b) The idea of everlasting life of the spirit has come from Greek culture (2 Cor. 5: 1-10).
- (c) Christology has been more expressive. Christ is called Wisdom (1 Cor. 1:30). Calling Christ as Lord (Kurios) has also Greek influence. Among the Greeks, there have been many gods and lords (1 Cor. 8:5).
- (d) There is specific Greek influence in his teachings about Holy Baptism and Holy Qurbana. In particular, we can see that the mystic religions of those days having their philosophies and rituals connected with saviors who die and resurrect.
- (e) Stoic thoughts obviously have influenced him in his ethical exhortations.
- (f) In his style of narrations, Stoic influence is expressive; Stoic philosophers have been following a pattern called diatribe in their exhortations; here, arguments are presented as if answering questions (Romans 2:1-3:9).
- (g) The word and idea ‘conscience’ is not from Jewish religion; Paul would have taken this from Greek philosophy (Romans 2: 14, 15).

To a good extent, we can see Greek influence in the language and formulation of ideas by Paul. However, on deep examination, it gets revealed that such influence was to a minimal level only. For example, while discussing the clash between spirit and flesh, Paul never considered flesh as evil whereas the Greek believed so. While advising to submit our body completely to God (Romans 12:1, 2) and in his stand that there is a resurrection for the body, Paul is relying on Jewish faith. Such a stand can never be taken in a Greek background. Likewise, calling Christ as Lord is not based on Greek religious principles. In the Greek translation of Old Testament Known as Septuagint, Lord (Kurios) is a term being used to mean Yahweh. Thus, it comes to light that Paul was influenced by the Greek version of Old Testament. The view Paul has been holding about sacraments is in total

variance with mystery religions. May be, there are similarity in certain words, but ideas are totally different. Such words do appear not only with mystery religions, but also with certain Jewish writings available during the 1st century.

Jewish Religious and Cultural Background:

While we think about Paul, the Jewish influence on him can never be ignored. Till his end, Paul was a strong and courageous Jew without any change whatsoever in his stand at any moment and was feeling proud at that. In all his epistles, a Jewish feel was too evident (1 Cor. 10:1; Romans 4:1; 2 Cor. 11:22; Philippians 3: 4-6). Though he has been the Apostle for gentiles, he has never diluted the faith and traditions of his fathers. He has been following all rituals of Jewish religion seriously (1 Cor. 16:8; Acts 18:18; 21: 17-26).

The ideas and advice of Paul has its base in Old Testament. He has been quoting frequently from Old Testament. Not only during his argumentative dialogues with Jewish leaders, even on other occasions also, he has been relying on Old Testament in formulating Christian thoughts. For linking moral issues with theological truths, he has been looking to Old Testament (Galatians 5:14; compare with Leviticus 19:18; 1 Thess. 5:8; Isaiah 59:17).

At the same time, one cannot explain the thought processes of St Paul exclusively from his approach to Old Testament. If one looks at the Jewish religion after the Old Testament books and the then available deuterocanonical books, it can be seen that Paul has relied on them as well; scholars point out that he has taken certain value based pieces from books like Thobit and Enoch.

Also, the Rabbis' advice have influenced Paul considerably; the thinking that God's various commands have come to Moses through angels is not seen in Old Testament, but Paul has accepted this from Rabbis (Galatians 3:19). Similarly, again it was the teachings of Rabbis that the 'spiritual' rock that gave water to Israel during their days in the desert has been travelling with them through the desert; this is not stated so in the Old Testament. Paul has accepted this (1 Cor. 10:4). The influence and views of Rabbis are quite expressive in Paul's ideas and arguments (for example, see Galatians 4: 24-26).

Once the Dead Sea Scrolls have come to light, we have information about the Qumran community and their traditions of faith. There are many references in the epistles of Paul hinting that he has been familiar with the ways of his community. Many of the ideas expressed by Paul in his epistles are also seen in Qumran literature. These illustrate the prevalence Greco Persian cultural influence in the first century Jewish religion of Palestine. Many things we have been thinking that Paul has acquired from Greek culture have been part of the Jewish religion of Palestine prevalent even before Paul.

There are similarities in words like mystery and wisdom frequented in Qumran literature with usages of Paul; such similarities are evident while moral values are explained.

The name Belial given to Satan (2 Cor. 6: 14, 15) is not seen anywhere else in the New Testament. Similar are the usages namely 'rulers', 'powers' and 'children of indiscipline' which are seen in the Qumran scrolls. (Ref. Ephesians 1:21; 3; 10; Colossians 1:16; 2:10; 1Peter 3:22)

'Justifying through faith' is a very important theory formulated by St Paul. In the teachings of Qumran community, we see a God who justifies. Paul has been telling about women covering their head while participating in worship (1 Cor. 11: 10-16). It is mentioned there: "On account of the angels, then, a woman should have a covering over her head "and the meaning here is not quite clear from itself; but, the Qumran teachings express that during worships, angels are present; St Paul is presenting this thought here.

From what all points have been discussed above, we can conclude reasonably that the Jewish religion has been having a great influence on St Paul, particularly, the teachings of the Rabbis those have developed during the latter stages.

Paul was a Jew and that too a Pharisee Jew. At the same time, he was brought up in a Greco cultural background. There is nothing wrong to say that the cities Rome, Athens and Jerusalem as well as their culture had good influence on St Paul.

Exercise:

1. What are the arguments confirming the Greco culture of St Paul?
2. Prove from the Book of Acts that even after becoming a Christian, St Paul had been following rituals of Jewish religion.
3. Examine the advantages St Paul had from his cultural background in carrying out his Christian activities.

Lesson 2

Transformation of Paul

Biblical Portions # Gist of the Event # How do we explain? # Changes

The transformation of Paul is an event that is worth studying. The Pharisee youth who was a persecutor of Christian Church has become a Christian. How? The Book of Acts 9: 1-19; 22: 4-16 and 26: 9-18 explain that event. More than that, the apostle himself narrates it in his Epistle to Galatians chapter 1:11-17.

Saul was travelling to Damascus threatening to persecute the Christian Church. Close to Damascus by noon, Saul and his companions saw a light that was extremely bright; the light was too sharp that Saul fell on the ground. He heard a voice, "Saul, Saul! Why do you persecute me?" The resurrected Christ appeared and separated Saul for the service of Christ. For the next three days, Saul was blind and was staying with a believer named Jude at his house in Damascus. Ananias, a leader of the Church (not that Ananias mentioned in chapter 5 of the Book of Acts) had a revelation from Christ to

proceed to Saul; he conveyed his mission to Saul. Ananias placed his hands on Saul and his sight was recovered; he was immediately baptized and added to the Church.

Importance of the Event:

This event transformed the life of Saul in its wholesome totality; thus this is very important historically and theologically. There are people who interpret this incident as an act of mental imbalance caused due to a sun stroke; there are others who ignore what happened there externally and see this as a feeling Saul had in his mind. They work out certain explanations relying on Psychological insights; Saul was immersed in the joy of Jewish Law and was moving forward to execute plans to satisfy the Law; but he had been emotionally disturbed. He had persecuted Christians to satisfy Law, but was repenting in his heart of hearts for killing innocent Christians and as a sequel to such repentance, he accepted Christianity, and thus go their explanations.

It is not at all advisable for us to ignore what had been happening externally. Paul viewed this incident as something very crucial and believed that he had seen the resurrected Christ in his full glory. Whatever could be interpreted psychologically, Paul had his total faith that Christ revealed himself to him and chosen him as an Apostle. This belief of Paul is a truth that is unquestionable. He had once asked: "Am I not an Apostle? Haven't I seen Jesus, our Lord?" (1 Cor. 9:1) "Last of all, he appeared also to me, even though I am like someone whose birth was abnormal" (1 Cor. 15:8). This is a sincere claim of Paul. He was sharply aware of that event that had transformed him totally. He believed that he was raised to the position of an apostle by a direct call of Christ and his revelation. When those opposing him questioned, he argued with confidence that he was in no way lower than other apostles for he was called direct by Christ.

The changes in Paul after the transformation:

1. Paul has got convinced that Jesus of Nazareth is really the one who completes history. Like other Jews, Paul was also looking forward to the coming of Christ (Messiah) as the realization of prophecies. He believed that Jesus of Nazareth was that Messiah because of the Damascus incident. "Because of our sins he was handed over to die, and he was raised to life in order to put us right with God "(Romans 4:25). While he was travelling to Damascus Paul was well aware of Jesus who was hung on the tree. But he considered him as 'cursed' by Law (Deuteronomy 21:23). However, based on the revelation he had, Paul understood that the death of Jesus was cause for the salvation of the whole mankind including him. Having been 'cursed' by Law, Jesus was redeeming the whole creation. "For the message about Christ's death on the cross is nonsense to those who are being lost; but for us who are being saved it is God's power" (1 Cor. 1:18).
2. Consequent to this, Paul's eschatonic views got changed. Before the Damascus incident, like other Jews, Paul too believed in three stages of history, namely (a) From Adam to Mosses, (b) from Mosses to Messiah and (c) from Messiah to the new era. But now, Paul got convinced of a Messianic Age and that has already come. The anticipated eschatonic age has commenced, but it reaches its wholeness with the second coming of Messiah in His fullness of glory.
3. Till the Damascus incident, Paul held a view that Jews alone were the people of God; salvation was exclusively for them. However, once Jesus came to him, Paul understood that Jesus was the redeemer of gentiles also. When Jesus came to earth, he was welcomed by

the poor and the marginalized; it was they who received the gospel of eternal life. Therefore eternity was for all, not for any particular community. The demarcation between Jews and gentiles disappeared. Redemption was open to gentiles also. Paul believed that Jesus called him to be his messenger to preach this good news to all. "But God in his Grace chose me even before I was born, and called me to serve Him. And decided to reveal His Son to me, so that I might preach the Good News about Him to the gentiles" (Galatians 1: 15, 16).

4. "Saul, Saul! Why do you persecute me?" "Who are you Lord?" "I am Jesus, whom you persecute" (Acts 9: 4, 5). These exchanges gave Saul a new vision of the Church. He was persecuting the followers of Christ, but the question raised was "Why do you persecute me?" This means that when the followers of Christ are attacked, in effect, Christ himself is attacked. This indicates the unbreakable relation between the Church and Christ. (See Matthew 25:40, 45.) One strong advice Paul exhorts is that the Church is the body of Christ. This has been explained elaborately in the epistles to Colossians and Ephesians. Though this faith was developed later, the idea was born during the above Damascus conversation.
5. One more vision was formed about the Church. Paul was holding a stand that the Jews were God's chosen people. This idea underwent a radical change. The Christian Church is the chosen people, and that is Israel or new Israel. He has dealt this issue at depth in his epistles (Romans 11: 13-23).

Paul knew that the experience of salvation can be realized only through one's relation and unity with the Church notwithstanding any direct call from Christ or even by possessing a spirituality of a very high level. This is precisely the reason why Ananias had to come to Paul and baptize him for taking to the fellowship of the Church. It can be noted that the subsequent life of Paul prospered in relation with the Church only. Some of the German scholars had formulated a theory wide which Paul was projected separately, detaching him from his fellowship with the early Church. But such tendencies are harmful and far from truth. Paul could learn more about the principles of salvation through his close association with the Church. Even his knowledge of Christ became more meaningful and grew deep through the Church.

Exercise:

1. Prepare a detailed narration about transformation making references to the Book of Acts and Epistle to Galatians.
2. Many claim to have revelations these days. Evaluate such revelations based on the experience Paul had while travelling to Damascus.
3. Explain how the transformation of Paul was useful for the Christian Church.
4. What were the major changes in the life of Paul after the Damascus incident?

Lesson 3

Paul and Early Church

The tendency to picture Paul as a loner # Commitment to the Apostolic Church # Knowledge about the tribulations, death and resurrection of Christ as well as about Christ's teachings # The Traditions within the Church those keep Changing # About Holy Baptism and Holy Qurbana

It is pointed out in the last lesson that there has been a tendency by a few scholars to project Paul as a lone towering personality. This has its roots in the Tubingen University in Germany. They see Paul as one who has been in enmity with the Jewish Christian Community. They consider that the Jerusalem Church has been trying to subdue the activities of Paul. However, this is far from truth. There is no evidence of Jerusalem Church having opposed Paul even once apart from a section of Jewish oriented people having passed some remarks against him. In fact, the Jerusalem Church has recognized the works carried out by him; they have been encouraging him in all respects (Galatians 2:9). "James, Peter and John, who seemed to be the leaders, recognized that God had given me this special task; so they shook hands with Barnabas and me, as a sign that we were all partners. We agreed that Barnabas and I would work among the Gentiles and them among the Jews".

Paul always recalls the 'Twelve' with respect. He rated him as smallest among all apostles. (Refer 1 Cor. 15:5; 15:9). However, on occasions when his apostleship has been questioned, he has pointed out firmly that he has not been indebted to any one for that position. He has made such statements only at certain solitary attempts to degrade him or to deny him (Galatians 1; 1, 17-19; 2:6-9).

Paul has been holding on to the very same faith of the Apostolic Church. He came to know about the teachings of Christ and about the tribulations Christ has undergone as also the death and resurrection from apostolic traditions. He is quite familiar to what has been taught by Christ. Neither has he mentioned much on the teachings of Christ, nor has he quoted Christ frequently in his epistles; yet it is obvious that he is very much aware of them. There are reflections of such teachings in most epistles of Paul.

We read in the epistles of Paul:

We read in the gospels:

Romans	12:14	Matthew	5:44
Romans	13:7	Matthew Luke	22:21 20:22
Romans	13:8	Matthew	22: 39,40
Romans	14:13	Matthew Luke Mark	18:7 17:1,2 9:42
1 Thessalonians	5:2	Matthew	24:43
1 Thessalonians	5:13	Mark	9:50

The above chart proves that Paul has direct relationship with Christ's teachings. Indeed, he has been giving importance and recognition to what Christ has taught. Also, he has de-marked what Christ has taught distinctly from his own teachings as we see in 1 Cor. 7: 10, 12. The familiarity of Paul with the teachings of Christ can be said to have acquired from the Apostolic Church.

Not only such teachings, but even the life and character of Christ too have become familiar to Paul. It is quite obvious that the 'song of love' penned by Paul has been based on the life of Christ (1 Cor. 13). He claims that he was trying to emulate Christ. "Imitate me, then, just as I imitate Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). There is no doubt that Paul understood Christ through the early Church.

It can be seen that Paul has accepted many of the faith and traditions formulated in the Church. These are also revealing his relation and commitment to the early Church. See these examples:

1. 1 Cor. 15:3ff- Paul has been holding on to traditions (Paradosis) received from the early Church and there is no doubt about that. "I passed on to you what I received" (1 Cor. 15:3). There are five notable facts about the death and resurrection of Christ in this tradition. This tradition would have formulated in the Jerusalem Church and Paul would have learnt this from there.
2. 1 Cor. 11:23ff- Paul is telling here about the tradition "I received from the Lord the teaching that I passed on to you". The term "from the Lord" need not mean that the Lord has spoken direct; it means what is there from the Church, what is there from the Lord who lives in the Church.
3. Romans 1:3-5; 10:8, 9- the scholastic opinion is that these verses reflect the ancient forms of faith that have been existing in the Church. They have reached this inference considering the facets and the manner of what has been stated.
4. Paul has quoted certain hymns and songs those were popular in the Church. "Wake up, sleeper, and rise from death, and Christ will shine on you" (Ephesians 5:14) is a hymn that has been used in the service of Holy Baptism as ascertained by scholars. Possibly, when the person being baptized comes out of water, the assembled congregation would have been singing this. Similarly, Philippians 2:6-11 too is a hymn written before Christ and was popularly used in the Church. However, Paul has presented this in a deeper sense making it more enlightening to the believers. Though there is no conclusive proof, there are scholars holding a view that this is a hymn used in the Holy Qurbana by the Palestinian Church.

Holy Baptism, Holy Qurbana:

The sacraments Holy Baptism and Holy Qurbana were there in existence before Paul had come to the Church. Paul learnt the tradition and faith related to these sacraments from the early Church. Rom. 6:3 makes a specific advice on Baptism which commences, "for surely you know that" By that time, Paul had not visited Rome; he had not taught Romans. However, he has been under the impression that whatever is taught about Baptism at other places has been taught in Rome also.

Clear faith and rituals were formulated on Holy Qurbana too in the early Church. The apostle accepted them without question. Wherever 'off the line tendencies were prevalent, he revealed true faith with clarity.

Whatever we have studied so far prove that Paul has been related to early Church in its fullness. Nobody can count him alien to that. His faith took roots in the Church; it grew with the Church; it spread through the Church. In formulating Paul's faith in its absoluteness, the early Church did play a very crucial role that can never be forgotten.

Exercise:

1. Discuss how true this statement is: 'Christian life gets properly nourished only through a relation with the Church'.
2. Prove with suitable examples that Paul has been following the traditions of the early Church totally.
3. It is found that Paul has been quoting the teachings of Christ to a very minimal level in his epistles. What are the reasons behind this?

Lesson 4**The Characteristics of Missionary Activities of Paul**

Clarity of Mission # In Relation with Church – Holy Spirit Induced # Joint Actions – In Main Towns # Not Being a Burden to Churches – Messages and Signs

Paul had clarity about his call and his mission. He believed that he was an apostle of Christ chosen by God. "But God in His Grace chose me even before I was born, and called me to serve Him. And when he decided to reveal His Son to me, so that I might preach the Good News about Him to the Gentiles, I did not go to anyone for advice" (Galatians 1: 15,16). Here, Paul has clearly presented his apostolic insight. Even in other parts of his epistles also, we have thoughts similar to this.

Paul believed that he was called to spread the Good News among the Gentiles. "I have been bold because of the privilege God has given me of being a servant of Christ to work for the Gentiles. I serve like a priest in preaching the Good News from God, in order that the Gentiles may be an offering acceptable to God dedicated to Him by the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15: 15,16).

He travelled across the length and breadth of the Roman Empire to achieve his mission. We have detailed information of his work in Rome from the Book of Acts. He undertook three lengthy journeys for his mission and during each of these trips he identified different areas of the empire to concentrate his work. After freed from his first imprisonment in Rome, he chose the western areas of the empire to preach the gospel as we learn from traditions. Like that, he was working hard to preach Good News till the end of his life as a servant of Christ.

There are a few good learning points for us from the missionary activities of Paul. We have to take them as a base for our mission activities.

In Relation to Church:

Paul's works were always in line with that of the Church. It was the Church with its blessings sent Paul and Barnabas for mission works as induced by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13: 1-3). After completing their first missionary sojourn they come back and gave a briefing of their experiences to the Church (Acts 14: 26, 27). The call and the choice came from God, but the Church was the body that had to send one for mission work. The works had to be carried out in relation with Church.

Holy Spirit Induced:

While they were serving the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said to them, “set apart for me Barnabas and Saul to do the work to which I have called them” (Acts 13:2). All the journeys and movements of the apostle were in control and direction of the Holy Spirit. See Acts 16: 6, 7. The planning or organization of men is not very important, not that they are not needed, but the directions of the Holy Spirit has to be taken in priority. For this, we have to wait in prayer.

Joint Actions:

It is known to all that Jesus sent those seventy and later the twelve, but they were sent not as ones, but in twos (Mark 6:7; Luke 10:1). Here, Jesus was laying the foundation of the principle of working together. In his first mission, Paul had Mark and Barnabas with him; halfway through, Mark left them, which was not well taken by Paul. The second journey commenced in the company of Silas (Acts 15:39); later, Luke joined them. Since the term ‘we’ is used from 16:10 onwards, it could be presumed that Luke, the one who wrote the Book of Acts, was with them from this stage onwards. Timothy too joined them shortly.

In Corinth, Paul worked with Aquila and Priscilla. Thus, it could be seen that Paul had always carried out his mission work with a team.

Concentrated in main Towns:

Paul concentrated his activities in the main towns of the Roman Empire. He was active in places like Paphos, the capital of the island Cyprus, Antioch in Pisidia and towns like Derbe, Lystra and Iconium of Laconia area. During his second journey, he revisited these entire places as also towns like Troas, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athena and Corinth and worked. This was followed a little later by the third journey and he travelled through areas like Galatia and Phrygia to reach Ephesus, the big city of Asia. He stayed here for three years and preached the Good News. Paul was concentrating in big towns with a view that it would be possible for the gospel to reach nearby smaller centers rather quickly.

Paul always had a clear planning for each journey. “But now that I have finished my work in these regions and since I have wanted for so many years to come to see you, I hope to do so now. I would like to see you on my way to Spain, and be helped by you to go there, after I have enjoyed visiting you for a while” (Romans 15:23, 24).

Follow up measures:

The strategy of Paul was not to form a Church at one place and then leave, but he used to carry out follow up visits to encourage them to sustain in faith. He did whatever he could to ensure a systematic growth and proper development. In his first journey, he had faced stiff opposition and even stone throwing and persecution at Lystra, but on return, he visited them again. In his second sojourn too, he revisited all the places before moving out to new areas. Wherever he could not revisit such places due to other preoccupations, Paul ensured that his committed co workers were deputed. Also, whenever he came to know about disputes within a Church, he attended them on priority by sending suitable advisory letters to tackle the issues so that solutions were immediately

created. Such letters were not limited to a single one; need be, he was sending more than one. This showed that he had a true concern for all those Churches (2 Cor. 11:28).

Preaching and Healing:

Jesus sent his 'twelve' to preach the kingdom of God, to heal the sick and cast out demons. They carried out their mission accordingly. Paul too has the same mission to carry out. He was very enthusiastic to preach the Good News. "I have no right to boast just because I preach the gospel. After all, I am under orders to do so; and how terrible it would be for me if I did not preach the gospel!" (1 Cor. 9:16; also Romans 1: 14-16)

Paul had preached, had healed the sick and had cast out demons. This had revealed his apostolic authority and powers. He says, "I will be bold and speak only about what Christ has done through me to lead the Gentiles to obey God. He has done this by means of words and deeds" (Romans 15:18). It was necessary to prove under the circumstance prevailed then that Paul too possessed the same power, the same position and the same authority of other apostles. In the Book of Acts, Luke presented Paul as one who was as powerful as Peter and as one strong enough to perform signs.

The mission work performed by Christ and followed by the Apostles involved ensuring physical well being of the people. This has to be accepted as part and parcel of mission activities; indeed as a basic aim of mission.

Worked hard for self sustenance:

Paul was very particular that he should not be a financial burden for others. As such he worked hard for earning his livelihood himself; making tents was an occupation familiar to him (Acts 18:3).

But as he was not accepting anything from others, there were people to criticize him; they argued that he did not deserve to take from others; also he did not have the authority to do so. To this, he replied that it was not due to lack of authority, but he wanted to be independent on this issue (read 1 Cor. 9: 6-14). He recalled what our Lord had advised: "A worker should be given what he needs". Paul writes, "We did not accept anyone's support without paying for it. Instead, we worked and toiled; we kept working day and night so as not to be an expense to any of you. We did this, not because we have no right to demand our support; we did it to be an example for you to follow" (2 Thess. 3: 8, 9).

Exercise:

1. What all insights you get from Romans 15: 15-20 on the missionary works of Paul?
2. What all we can emulate from the style of Paul to be implemented in the mission works in India now?
3. How did Paul maintain his relations with Churches?

Lesson 5

Epistles of Paul and their Characteristics

All epistles are not traceable # Those available have undergone editing # Epistles are written considering the circumstances # Structure of epistles resemble ancient writing styles, but necessary changes are introduced

Epistles of St Paul constitute almost one fourth of the New Testament. These are considered very important next to the gospels. These epistles reveal Paul as a person as well as his theological insights. What we have in the Book of Acts is the version of Luke and therefore, it cannot be taken at par with the epistles which are directly written by Paul or under his authority.

1. We do not have all the epistles written by Paul; some are considered lost. In his 1st epistle to Corinthians, there is a mention about a previous epistle to them (1 Cor. 5: 9), but there is no trace about that. There is a school of thought that a part of this missing letter is there in 2 Cor. 6:14 – 7:1. Similarly, it is stated in 2 Cor. 2:4 that a letter was written in tears and great mental agony; it is thought that a portion of this is available in 2 Cor. Chapters 10 to 13. Again, Col. 4:16 mentions about a letter to the Church of Laodicea, which too is not traceable. In short it has to be accepted that we do not have all letters written by Paul. Many epistles written by Paul are understood to have been edited later. Close studies reveal that 2nd epistle to Corinthians and the epistle to Philippians have undergone such editing. In Philippians 3:1, a joyous mood is revealed and immediately after, there is a warning, “watch out for those who do evil things, those dogs, those men who insist on cutting the body” which seems to lack logic in this context. Again, the joyous mood continues in 4:1. Likewise, 2 Cor. 6:14 – 7:1 looks not in unison with portions before it and after it as if it is separate from the rest. If one reads this epistle up to 6:13 and then goes to 7:2, there seems to be proper continuity of ideas expressed. Again, 2nd Corinthians chapters 8 and 9 looks like ideas those have been arranged at random from different sources looking like indifferences and inconsistencies in expressions. All these indicate some editing having undergone in this epistle. Thus, we have so far seen two aspects namely, one, all epistles written by Paul are not available and two, those available epistles have undergone editing.
2. In general, we have to understand that the different epistles were written under various circumstances. In other words, they were not written like essays or papers inspired by internal instincts. Again, they were not written as spiritual treatise for all the believers across the world to read and meditate. The purpose behind these epistles were guiding the Churches how to address the problems they were confronting and how to tackle their internal issues. (May be the epistles to Romans and Ephesians can be said to be different). The epistles of Paul to each Church were his responses to their problems. So, in order to learn the contents of such epistles, we have to first understand the circumstances of each Church and their peculiar issues. For this, we have no sources now apart from these epistles. We have to analyze the epistles and understand their issues and then see how the Apostle managed to suggest solutions. Problems of each Church differed from one another and therefore each letter was in line with their issues exclusively. Letters were needed because it was not possible practically to visit each of those Churches. It is quite sensible to think that these letters were not needed at all had there been telephone facility at that time. Thus,

letters were needed just because a direct contact with Churches was not possible. Now, the question is if these epistles were written addressing the issues of local Churches in the Roman Empire, how could they be universally relevant now? Here, two facts are to be noted. (1) The issues prevailing then are present even now in today's Church in the same or different manners and therefore, the directives of the Apostle are certainly relevant; (2) the epistles were written not with a general conception, but as induced by the Holy Spirit and therefore they have a lasting message in them. Thus their lasting and eternal relevance need not be doubted.

3. Paul had written these letters modeled in the ancient style, but necessary changes here and there were made without any hesitation. Excavators have unearthed many ancient documents from which we can understand the models popular among the Greek and Romans. Paul had followed these models, but with required changes.
 - a. All letters commence with greetings to the recipient. Paul modified the traditional style of greetings by introducing a Christian tone. The greetings were made not by Paul alone, but in unison with a few others except in the epistles to Romans and Galatians. The wordings of such greetings are chosen carefully that there were some clues pinpointing to the contents of the letter.
 - b. In ancient letters, the greetings were followed by glorifying God for the health and welfare of the recipients. Paul glorifies God for the recipients' Christian life experiences, but this is omitted in the epistle to Galatians. The theme that is being discussed in the letter is briefly hinted here. The manner of glorifying God has slight variations in style in different epistles which is worth studying.
 - c. The body of the letter contains pieces of advice and discussions on the proposals being presented; the issues applicable to each Church are different and Paul addresses each in their own perspective. Since issues vary from Church to Church, we can see differences in approach here. He presents his ideas in relation to eschatonic hopes and aspirations. Occasionally, there is mention about his travel plans also (Romans 15:14-33; 1 Cor. 4:14-21; 2 Cor. 12:14 ff; Gal. 4:12-20; Phil. 2:19-24; Philemon 21-22). Scholars opine that Paul was conveying his travel plans to hint his apostolic authority and rights. The epistles contain moral exhortations also. Many of the exhortations have similarities in different epistles. Paul would have relied on the moral values those were prevailing then.
 - d. The ending of ancient letters used to be wishes for good health. But Paul has modified this with benedictions and doxologies because these letters were expected to be read in the worshipping congregation. The benedictions are made suitable for such occasions. In many of the epistles, there is a request to offer kisses of love among the recipients (Romans 16:16; 1Cor.16:20; 2Cor. 13:12; 1Thess.5:26). Generally, the epistles were dictated by Paul, but at the end, he used to add some winding up messages in his own hand. (1 Cor. 16: 21-24; Gal. 6:11; Philemon 19). The name of the one who wrote the letter is disclosed only in one letter (Romans 16:22).

All these letters were being sent through reliable persons of the community. The one who carries the letter is expected to read out the same in the congregation because the gathering used to be small enough to get accommodated in a house. He would have read it and possibly would have given necessary clarification wherever needed (Eph. 6:21-22; Col. 4:7,8). It shall also be noted that these letters were not meant to be read and understand, but to be

heard and understood; therefore the writing style and language adopted by the Apostle was suitable for that.

Exercise:

1. Discuss how did the personal letters of Paul assumed importance as scriptures.
2. Read 1 Corinthians and find out what the Church of Corinth has in common with today's Church of Kerala.
3. Examine the greetings in all the epistles and ascertain how and why they differ.

Lesson 6

The Timing and Message of the Epistles

Controversies regarding Epistles # First Epistle # Epistles of the second Journey # Epistles of the third journey # Epistles from the Jail # Pastoral Epistles

There are two controversies on the Epistles of Paul.

- (1) How many Epistles can be claimed to be of Paul truly? Though there are doubts on the Epistles to Hebrews, Orthodox tradition accepts the other thirteen are certainly of Paul. But many protestant scholars attribute for sure only seven to Paul; they are Epistles to Romans, Galatians, Philippians, Philemon, 1st Epistles to Thessalonians and both Epistles to Corinthians. The remaining ones are claimed by them as from sources close to Paul. We are not entering into their arguments on that and it is not necessary either.
- (2) Another dispute is on the period of those Epistles. From his side, Paul has been silent on this aspect in the body of them. Therefore, the timing of the Epistles has to be worked out on the basis of the contents therein as well as from the narrations we have in the Book of Acts. However, there can be differences of opinion and hence, a timing that is fool proof is not easy.

The Epistles based on their timings:

The epistles are not placed chronologically in the New Testament. His very first Epistle is the one addressed to the Galatians. This is understood to be written after his first missionary journey. Yet, there are scholars holding different views. Two Epistles are written during his second journey namely 1st and 2nd Epistles to Thessalonians from Corinth in AD 52. Three epistles can be linked with the third mission travel as 1st epistle to Corinthians from Ephesus in AD 52, 2nd one to Corinthians from Philippi in AD 53 and to Romans from Corinth in AD 55.

Next four are considered to be written from the jail and hence popularly called the Jail epistles. However, scholars are not united when it comes to from which Jail they are written. Traditionally, it is considered that they are from the jail in Rome in the year and AD 61 and 62. However, the Book of Acts is not very specific that these are Epistles to Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon. On the presumption that Paul has been in jail at Ephesus, there are views that the Epistle to

Philippians has been written from there; we can just concur that this opinion need not be dismissed outright.

The pastoral epistles are those understood to be written last; 1st Epistle to Timothy in AD 64 from Corinth, Epistle to Titus in AD 65 possibly from Corinth, 2nd Epistle to Timothy in AD 67 from Rome and the last among these happens to be the very last Epistle of Paul.

The Key Messages from each of his Epistles:

Epistle to Galatians: The special feature of this epistle includes autobiographical facets as also strong responses to those who had been criticizing his being an apostle and his teachings.

The key message of this epistle can be pin pointed as the freedom in Christ; we have been brought to the glory of Christian freedom liberated from the law and the external rituals. It is shown that by our faith, we are reconciling with God. The epistle to Romans contains a deeper treatment on this.

Epistles to Thessalonians: After sending the first of these epistles, a second one was found necessary; both are similar in ideas and are related though there are people who argue that the second one is not of Paul but their stand don't carry weight.

The context of writing this epistle was on account of the opposition the Church of Thessalonica had to face from Jews; also, they were having certain misunderstandings about the second coming of Christ as well as some doubts on that.

Under such circumstances, it was necessary to console them and strengthen them. Further, their misunderstandings had to be addressed and corrected; these were the purposes behind the first epistle.

Later, some false letter was circulated among them which made them feel that the days of second coming of Christ are on hand and they were thought to be passing through great afflictions. To solve these confusions, the second epistle was written.

Among the significance behind this epistle, the insights of Paul about eschatonic faith have been revealed. Also, there are brief discussions on the resurrection of the departed and the second coming of Christ.

1st Epistle to Corinthians: What are being discussed here are the irregularities occurring in Churches in day to day affairs. This seems to be quite relevant to the present Church in India. The very first reference to Holy Qurbana is also seen here. The blessings from Holy Spirit are also discussed.

This Epistle was found necessary as Paul came to learn from the followers of Clova about certain irregularities being practiced in the Church at Corinth. Not only that, they had sent a letter to Paul seeking clarifications from Paul regarding their doubts on a few aspects. Thus, Paul wrote his Epistle addressed to Corinthians from Ephesus as a reply to them.

There are three significant learning points in this Epistle.

- a. We can understand the problems being confronted by a Church that is growing under gentile environment and how to address such issues leading to lasting solutions.

- b. There is a strong warning against schisms, against tendencies to initiate legal proceedings and against immoral activities.
- c. There are clear cut directives on marriage, offerings to idols, discipline during worships, blessings from Holy Spirit and resurrection of the departed.

2nd Epistle to Corinthians: It is generally felt that there had been an editing to the structure of this epistle. Chapters 10 to 13 stand a bit alien to the other parts. Early portion of the epistle deals with the issue of relief and how to experience relief in afflictions.

Certain developments in the Church of Corinth, after the first epistle, were the reason behind sending a second one to them. An important point to note here is that Paul is giving a prompt reply to those who has been criticizing his status as an Apostle; in this response, he ascertains his power and authority. Also, Paul explains the importance of giving charity as part of Christianity.

Epistle to Romans: This Epistle assumes more importance on theological ground in comparison with others and that is the reason why this is placed in the New Testament ahead of all others. It is said that Mar Ivaniose of golden tongue used to read this epistle fully once every week. This Epistle is said to have been an inspiration to the reformists of the West. More than an Epistle, this can be considered as a treatise on theology. We can see this as the point of entry to the theological wisdom of St Paul.

This was written by Paul before his visit to Rome so as to introduce him as well as his faith. The main points being covered are summed up as under:

- a. The age old question of how a man is righteous before God (Job 9:2) is clarified here.
- b. A sinner earning place before God is the perfect presentation of Good News.
- c. Crucial topics like faith, justification, purification and life in Christ are discussed.
- d. The place for Jews in the redemption plan of Christ is clarified.

Epistle to Philippians: This is a beautiful Epistle of Love. This is also called Epistle of Joy because throughout the epistle, there is a reflection of happiness.

During Paul's imprisonment, the Church of Philippi has been a helping hand to him (Philippians 4:10, 18). Paul expresses his gratitude to them for this. Further, he is suggesting remedial measures for a few of their problems having got surfaced during that period.

The importance of this epistle can be briefed as:

- a. There is a mention of the clergy of the Church such as Episcopas and Deacons.
- b. Paul is stressing the need to be humble; pride is enemy to unity.
- c. Chapter 2: 6-11 carries a crucial part of Christology. It explains how Christ came down having emptied himself and then how he was glorified.

Epistle to Philemon: This is a personal letter covering a matter that is rather confidential. Philemon was a member of the Church at Colossae. Onesimus was his slave who ran away to Rome stealing money from his master. By the grace of God, he happened to be with Paul at Rome and was influenced by him. Slowly, he got transformed and became a Christian. Paul sent him back to

Philemon so that he would reconcile with his master. This epistle is a letter of recommendation handed over to Onesimus addressed to Philemon.

The crux of the message can be summed up as:

- a. This Epistle reflects the love and affection of Paul as well as his openheartedness and compassion.
- b. He shows here how Christian forgiveness can be put into practice and the joy experienced from that.
- c. It also taught here that even if one is transformed, he has to compensate for his erroneous acts with repentance.
- d. It also illustrates what should be the attitude between a master and his slave.

Epistle to Colossians: It was Epaphras, a disciple of Paul who established the Church at Colossae (Col. 1:2; Philemon: 23). While Paul was in Rome, Epaphras called on him to convey the happenings at Colossae. Heresies had crept in; Gnosticism had caused much damage paving way for true faith being diluted; the main teachings under Gnosticism are: there are living beings as mediators between God and men and Christ is one among them and redemption through Christ is insufficient and incomplete; gave importance to festivals, new moon, full moon and Sabbath; observed avoidance of certain food items.

This Epistle contains appropriate strong reply to heretic teachings. The salient features are briefed as:

- a. Christological issues such as the godliness in Christ, relation with Church and redemption acts are explained with clarity.
- b. Heretic teachings are analyzed explaining their roots and suggestive measures to overcome them are advised.
- c. It is dangerous to discard what is said by Christ and lean towards human commands and philosophical thoughts.
- d. The clue about an Epistle to Laodicea gets revealed here.

Epistle to Ephesians: This is another Epistles standing in the forefront theologically and needs to be studied in relation to the one to Romans. This can also be considered as one written not exclusively to the Church of Ephesus, but in general to Churches across Asia Minor areas. This has not been written to address any peculiar situation or issue.

The key issues are in short, the following:

- a. The relation between Church and Christ is one of the key topics discussed here. The concept Paul possesses about Church is clearly presented here as the body of Christ (1:21-23; 4:14), the house of our Lord (2:21-22) and the bride of Christ (5:25-32).
- b. The first three chapters contain continuous flow of ideas as if water flows when a dam is burst; these indicate maturity of the depth of learning and meditation of the Apostle.
- c. The main thought of this Epistle is 'unification of the entire mankind in Christ through the Church'.

Pastoral Epistles: The two epistles to Timothy and the one to Titus explain the eligibilities and qualities of those who take up positions as shepherds in the Church and hence these are called Pastoral Epistles. Some argue that these are not of Paul. May be, we have these Epistles before us now after some sort of editing, but we will treat them as originated from Paul himself.

These three Epistles have some common features between them and are addressed to two Heads of the early Church. These letters indicate the need to apply more care to organizational and administrative matters as the initial stage of missionary service and expansion of Church have been accomplished to a reasonable extent. That was a time when the heretic Gnosticism was getting spread in the Church and causing disturbances.

Timothy was functioning as the Bishop of Ephesus. The first epistle to him would have been written at the commencement of the fourth missionary journey in AD 64 or so. When the Epistle to Titus was sent, he was the Bishop at Crete. The second one to Timothy was understood to be written in AD 65 when Paul was under imprisonment in Rome. Probably, this is the last of all epistles.

The importance of these epistles can be summed up as:

- a. These three epistles are basic guidelines on priesthood. There are detailed explanations on their qualities, qualifications and responsibilities.
- b. What was the heresy prevalent then is indicated; there are guidelines as to how we have to confront heresies at all times.
- c. There are clear indications to the three positions of priesthood namely Episcopa, Kaseesha, and Deacon.
- d. Further, this epistle gives an insight to the relation between Paul and his colleagues.

Exercise:

What has been covered in this lesson is general information about the epistles of Paul. Based on this, please read each of them and understand the contents; ensure to make notes in a book about the matters covered.

Unit 2

The Thought Processes of St Paul

Lesson 1

Who is Jesus Christ?

Let us look into some of the statements from Paul those are rich in meanings. "All I want is to know Christ" (Philippians 3:10). "What is life? To me, it is Christ. Death, then, will bring more" (Philippians 1:21). "So it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). These verses picture his relation with Christ and his views about Christ are spoken out. These are not earned using logic or intelligence, but has come through spiritual enlightenment and transformed into true faith. Paul could form these feelings about Christ because he could see Christ and could keep relation with him in person; a strong faith in Christ was thus systematized in him.

Once Paul could see Christ face to face, he understood that his quest and hard work for eternity has been fulfilled. Christ removed whatever obstacles were there in him so that reconciliation with God was possible for him. What Christ did for Paul was something that could have been done only by God. However, Paul has not been making any purposeful attempts to prove that Christ is God; yet, he has not been treating Christ lower than God. He has never viewed Christ different from God.

In his revelation of Christ, he had an influence of the early Church apart from his own experience. The question, "Who is Christ?" was seen answered by the Apostles during the time Christ was carrying out his public ministry (Mark 8:29). Though his death on the cross shattered their faith, the resurrection strengthened and made them powerful. Paul succeeded in brightening that faith. He did explain Christology in a most natural way out of his personal experience.

Son of God, the Eternal One:

Except in one two epistles, Paul has been picturing Christ as Son of God (Gal. 2:20; 3:26; 2Cor. 1:19; Eph. 4:13; Rom. 1:13). There is a history behind the term Son of God. The Pharaohs of Egypt used to be called in that title. During the era of Greco Roman power, emperors and rulers used to take this title. Among the Jewish tradition, angels were called Sons of God (Job 1:6; 2:1; Psalms 29:1; Daniel 3:25). Even this name was used to mean the Israelites as a whole (Exodus 4:22; Hosea 2:1; Isaiah 30:1). Occasionally, Kings and Judges were also called by this name. There is no specific indication of this name pointing to the coming messiah anywhere in the Old Testament. But the later day literature of Jewish community had used the name Son of God for messiah like what we see in Qumran scrolls.

The early Church called Jesus as Son of God unhesitatingly and believed so. Paul could follow this tradition. When Jesus Christ is called Son of God, it means that Jesus exists in unqualified and inseparable relation with God. Such a relation cannot be attributed to anybody else. The relation is affirmed when we say, 'one in essence'.

In his Epistle to Colossians, the revelation of Christ in Paul reaches its zenith; "The full content of divine nature lives in Christ" (Col. 2:9). Further, "Christ is the visible likeness of the invincible God. For through him God created everything in heaven and on earth, the seen and the unseen things, including spiritual powers, lords, rulers and authorities. God created the whole universe through him and for him. Christ existed before all things, and in union with him all things have their proper place" (Col. 1:15 - 17).

Paul strongly believed in the eternity of Son. The above letter is proof good enough for that. "But when the right time finally came, God sent His own Son" (Gal. 4:4). The above truth is underlined by Paul in this statement. The Epistle to Philippians throw more light to these; "He always had the

nature of God, but he did not think that by force he should try to become equal with God He became like man and appeared in human likeness” (Philippians 2: 6, 7). It is said that when he took flesh, he emptied himself. “Rich as he was, he made himself poor for your sake” (2 Cor. 8:9). Paul had his own specific concepts about the incarnation of God as human as also about the acts of redemption.

Resurrection and the position ‘Lord’:

The death and resurrection of Christ happens to be the central point of Paul’s theology. And this is not just a past event in history; instead, a true feeling that gets enlightened through us as a reality of the present, an unparalleled event in the universe.

The Apostolic Church always used to think death and resurrection of Christ together (Mark8:31; 9:31). They are two sides of the redemption act. Paul too thought likewise. Even before Paul came to work, tradition regarding the resurrection of Christ had taken deep roots within the Church. Paul quotes, “I passed on to you what I received, which is of the greatest importance” (1 Cor. 15:3). Following this, Paul explains the tradition on the death and resurrection of Christ. Also, he witnesses his own experiences with authority (Refer 1 Cor. 15: 8). “All I want is to know Christ and to experience the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings and become like him in his death” (Philippians 3:10).

Resurrection is thought to be a great act of God (Romans 1:4). Paul always used to keep telling that God raised Christ from dead (1 Thess. 4:14 alone is different). The great might of God was seen in the resurrection of Christ (Eph. 1:19 ff). This made one believe without compromise that Jesus was messiah. “As to his divine holiness, he was shown with great power to be the Son of God by being raised from death” (Romans 1:4).

What Believers experience is the power of Christ’s resurrection. They die with him and rise with him in Holy Baptism and thus get familiarized with that power (Romans 6:4 ff). As such, we are called to a life that is not subject to sin. Life gets renewed on the basis of resurrection of Christ as also by the strength of resurrection.

The root of eschatonic hope also is the resurrection of Christ (1 Thess. 4:4). Christ has resurrected from the dead as the first fruit and therefore whoever believes in him too shall be raised to eternity. “We know that God, who raised the Lord Jesus to life, will also raise us up with Jesus and take us together with you, into his presence” (2 Cor. 4:14). Paul argues that since Jesus was raised from dead, we too shall be raised from death (1 Cor. 15:13ff).

The Name, Lord:

The name Lord is very frequently used by Paul in his epistles. This was a name assigned to Greco Roman gods. Moreover, many rulers also used it.

But, what is dominant in Paul is Jewish tradition rather than Greek tradition. Jews use the Hebrew term Adonai instead of Yahweh in worship and scripture readings. This term means ‘my lord’. In the Septuagint version of Old Testament, instead of Yahweh, the term ‘Kurios’ is used, which again means ‘lord’. What we can infer here is that the term ‘lord’ has been given to Jehovah and therefore,

when the very same term is used for Jesus Christ, it has to be understood that Christ has been considered par with Jehovah.

Again, it has to be seen that the term lord is used for Christ not during his period of public ministry, but after the resurrection and glorification. Or, the name Lord is assigned through resurrection (Romans 1:4). He has authority and lordship over all creations. "I solemnly promise by all that I am: Everyone will come and kneel before me and vow to be loyal to me (Isaiah 45:23). Paul interprets this statement of the Prophet about Jehovah as connected to Christ (Philippians 2:10). This makes one realize that Christ has all authority and power equal to that of Jehovah.

Exercise:

1. Read these portions: Col. 1:15-20; 2: 6-10; Hebrews 1:2-4. Now look for the insights you get about Christ.
2. Why should one believe in the resurrection of Christ?

Lesson 2

What did Jesus Christ do? (Redemption Acts)

Understanding Redemption Acts of Christ # Metaphors Used # Related to Exodus – Related to Creations # From Sacrifice # From the Seat of Judgment – What is Faith?

We have understood certain truths about Jesus Christ from the last lesson. Such truths lead us to the acts of redemption Christ has been carrying out. The study on Christology completes a full circle only with the understanding of Christ's salvation acts. The epistles of Paul have explained these aspects effectively. He has used quite a few metaphors for a meaningful treatment of this topic in its full depth. May be, such metaphors are not that familiar to us today or they are too complicated. However, the contemporaries of Paul were finding them familiar and understandable.

The metaphors were taken by Paul from Jewish traditions with which he was quite at home. The faith and rituals of Jewish religion had helped Paul in formulating such presentations. The exodus from Egypt to Canaan under the leadership of Moses was a great historical event. What would be happening at the end through Messiah and that experience was presented by Paul as a new Exodus and a great liberation. (See 1 Cor. 10: 1-11). In this background, Paul calls the salvation act of Christ as a process of redemption.

Redemption:

The meaning of the word redemption has to be understood based on Old Testament and Jewish religion (Romans 3:24; 1Cor. 1:30). The meaning of the equivalent Hebrew verbal form is 'to retrieve' or 'place in its proper manner the one that had been lost'. To redeem a slave means lead him to real freedom from his slavery. Israel was people of God, but they were slaves in Egypt. For them,

redemption means bringing them back to freedom to enjoy their rights with Jehovah. Please refer Psalm 77:15, Exodus 6:6 and 15:13. Bringing back the Israelites from their exile in Babylon is pictured as redemption by Isaiah (41:14).

When Paul used this metaphor, it was something that had taken deep roots in Jewish tradition. In this background, the new Israel or Christian Church has to experience redemption from sin. God was redeeming his people who were lost in sin so that they would be his own again.

Adopted to give status of God's own son:

On reading Galatians 3:23 – 4:7, we come to know that the Jews believed God has redeemed Israelites to elevate them as sons of God. This was also what the Rabbis had been teaching. The main point one has to pick up from this metaphor of sons of God is mainly, the unlimited mercy of God. Those slaves were elevated as sons of God. Here, there is nothing more significant than God's mercy (Deuteronomy 7: 7, 8).

The humankind was elevated by God to the status of his sons through Jesus Christ. In such elevation, there is no differences as to Jew and Greek or man and woman; instead, it is a high position for all (Romans 8:15 ff; Ephesians 1:5)

Newly Created:

The base for this metaphor is the faith in creation. The might of God was active in Exodus. The very same might was spread over creation. This whole universe was created by the same might of God.

Paul doesn't see the experiences one has with Christ as a new exodus, but that indicates a new creation. Jesus Christ provides a new order and a new status to mankind as also to the universe. Similar to creation in the beginning, a new creation is being formulated in Christ. "For it is not ourselves that we preach; we preach Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. The God who said, 'Out of darkness the light shall shine!' is the same God who made his light shine in our hearts, to bring us the knowledge of God's glory shining in the face of Christ' (2 Cor. 4: 5,6). We have a hint to the creation of universe here. Similarly, a new universe is coming up through Jesus Christ. "When anyone is joined to Christ, he is a new being; the old is gone, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17). This verse means that each individual becomes a new creation. To explain with clarity the true feel one attains through Christ, the term new creation alone would suffice.

Reconciliation:

The real effect of Adam's fall was that an animosity was developed with God; even between man and man too as we see in Cain and Abel incident. In other words, breaking of law created feelings of objections and alienation as well as an effort to be freed from God. Paul pictures this scenario as one of animosity and alienation. "We were God's enemies, but he made us his friends through the death of his Son; now that we are God's friends, how much more we will be saved by Christ's life! But that is not all; we rejoice because of what God has done through our Lord Jesus Christ, who has now made us God's friends" (Romans 5: 10, 11). Following this, Paul comes to Adam and therefore his thoughts turn towards the beginning of creation. "Through the son, then, God decided to bring the whole universe back to himself; God made peace through his son's sacrificial death on the cross and so brought back to himself all things, both on earth and in heaven" (Col. 1:20). Here, it is sated that

the alienation between man and nature has been eliminated through Christ. According to Paul, the mission of Christ itself is to achieve peace and reconciliation. Indeed, the service of Christ is one of reconciliation.

There is one more thing that needs to be specified here. Paul never says that God has any sort of ill feelings or hatred towards man. God aims at bringing man back to Him through His mercy and affection. For this, He took initiative to send His only son to earth. He is consistent in His attitude always. Inconsistency is the nature of man. Man became peaceful and calm consequent to his reconciliation with God (2 Cor. 13:11; Philippians 4:9; 1 Thess. 5:23).

Paul believed that man's reconciliation with God cause peace between man and man as also between man and nature (Eph. 2:16).

Christ, the sin offering sacrifice:

Another metaphor taken is the sacrifice associated with Jewish religious rituals; this was something which could be easily understood by people of those days. God assigned Jesus Christ as a means for redeeming people from their sins. God offered him, so that by his sacrificial death he should become the means by which people's sins are forgiven through their faith in him. In this way, God shows that he himself is righteous and that he puts right everyone who believes in Jesus (Rom. 3: 25, 26).

Paul says that Christ is the Passover lamb that has been sacrificed for mankind (1 Cor. 5:7). Likewise, the death of Christ is explained based on the sacrifice that takes place on the day of redemption of sins. "But by the free gift of God's grace all are put right with him through Christ Jesus, who sets them free" (Rom. 3:24). It was believed that on the day of redemption of sins, the High Priest enters the Holy of Holies with the blood of the slain animal and sprinkles it on the seat of mercy and thus sins are forgiven. But Paul says that Christ being true seat of mercy forgives our sins.

Justifying through faith:

Here we have a picture of the court of law. But this has to be understood in the light of Old Testament thought processes and Jewish faith. Normally, the word "justify" means ensuring justice. This means to initiate proper steps, punish the guilty and exonerate the innocent.

The Judge comes to a decision independently, based on available evidences and proclaims his judgment in a most truthful manner.

But this was not so in ancient Israel. The king occupies his seat of judgment and takes evidences; he is committed to ensure justice. He comes with a helping hand to the marginalized and persecuted. He works for their redemption; he passes judgments to pass on justice to them. Paul attributes this type of meaning to the word "justify". God who is always righteous saw the sad plight of man; he is helpless under pressures from sin. God comes to save man from his helplessness and to elevate him to a renewed position and a new goal through Jesus of Nazareth. In the mission of Christ, Paul saw a Lord who loves sinners and intercede for them. That Lord is merciful to mankind and works for their

elevation which is accomplished through his death on the cross. And man is always filled with thankfulness when he recalls this fascinating experience.

Role of Faith:

Paul has been explaining the redemption acts carried out by God through Jesus Christ using various metaphors. However, man has to learn how to earn this redemption from God; Paul replies to this: 'through faith'.

Faith doesn't mean accepting anything blindly; neither, faith means relying on a collection of philosophical inferences. Instead of stressing on man's capabilities and achievements, one has to accept his weaknesses and limitations; then totally submit to the divine love and mercy flowing from Jesus Christ; this is faith. Faith is self knowledge and self abandonment.

Exercise:

1. We have seen quite a few metaphors illustrating the redemption process in this lesson. Of them, which one is most suited under Indian context? Why?
2. How is faith related to acts?

Lesson 3

Life in Holy Spirit

Background of Faith – Expectations of Jewish Religion and Rabbis – Personal Experience of Paul – Christ and Holy Spirit # Holy Spirit, a Person # Thoughts in the Epistles to Corinthians – Symbols of Holy Spirit

Doctrine of the Holy Spirit is something one has to learn together with Christology. Both are related to each other as if two sides of a coin. Life in Christ can be seen as life in Holy Spirit. In the thoughts of Paul, the relation between Christ and Holy Spirit is inseparable. The Church is the body of Christ; Church is a community that lives in Holy Spirit.

Background of Paul's Faith:

Two vital aspects are to be born in mind here. Paul was a Jew. Insights about soul have come to him from his Jewish tradition. However, Paul became a Christian and his Jewish tradition was subjected to Christ's influence on him. Thus, these two aspects have played crucial roles in formulating his thoughts; Jewish tradition and experience in Christ.

In Jewish tradition, the term 'rooho' has meanings such as wind, soul in man, the power of God that enters man and so on. We are carrying out our discussion based on the third meaning shown here. In the Jewish belief of the Messianic era, there used to be expectations of the presence of Spirit.

Ezekiel 37: 1-11 gives a picture of the people of Israel who were like lifeless dry bones, being enthused when the Spirit or wind of God acted on them. Prophet Joel has pointed out Spirit coming to all bodies during the last days or Messianic age (2:26 ff). The early Church has been thinking that

Messianic age has already come and that the Holy Spirit has been showered on all. Paul was making his entry into this belief. Based on his own personal experiences, Paul analyzed the new feel of Holy Spirit he had with him and gave his explanations. With Jesus Christ accepting Paul, he was stepping into something new; that was life at a new level. He was freed from his confrontations with body. The new life was filled with a divine enlightenment that took total control of Paul. Paul believed that this divinity which entered him was nothing but God.

Relation between Christ and Holy Spirit:

There are statements about Christ and Holy Spirit which looked similar.

1. Love of God is made available to us through Christ and Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5 ; 8:39)
2. The believers experience peace in Christ and in Holy Spirit (Philippians 4:7 ; Romans 14:17)
3. Christ and Holy Spirit gives life (Rom. 6:23 ; 2 Cor. 3:6)
4. Christ and Holy Spirit lives in the hearts of believers (Rom. 8:10)

The actions of Spirit are discussed at par with those of Christ, revealing the individuality of both as persons and their mutual union.

Holy Spirit is a Person:

Paul has not been considering Spirit as enlightenment, but as a person like Christ and believed so. Spirit searches everything; even the hidden depths of God's purposes (1 Cor. 2:10). "In words taught by the Spirit" (1 Cor. 2:13) indicates the person in Spirit. "And do not make God's Holy Spirit sad; for the Spirit is God's mark of ownership on you, a guarantee that the Day will come when God will set you free" (Eph. 4:30).

The facets of a person as we understand are intellect, emotion and will. The above verses are proof enough that Holy Spirit possesses all these three. This is a great contribution of Paul to the Doctrine of Holy Spirit. This idea gets further elaborated in the gospel according to St John.

Gifts of Holy Spirit:

The gifts of Holy Spirit are discussed in detail in 1 Corinthians chapters 12 to 14. Paul is aiming to eradicate certain wrong notions those have entered the Church of Corinth. These exhortations are quite sufficient to address the wrong notions prevailing in today's Church also.

1. Any teaching about Holy Spirit has to be understood in relation to Christ. It has to be looked into whether the acts of Spirit help us to confess Christ as Lord (1 Cor. 12:3).
2. The Holy Spirit is active in us through different gifts of grace. There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit gives them. There are different ways of serving, but the same Lord is served. There are different abilities to perform service, but the same God gives ability to all for their particular service (1 Cor. 12:4 - 6). These are such gifts: wisdom, knowledge, faith, power to heal, power to work miracles, speaking God's messages, ability to speak in strange languages and the ability to explain what is said.
3. Though there are different gifts, Spirit that gives such gifts is one. Through these gifts, unity and edification are being made possible. There are many organs in a body, but though the

organs are different, all are joined in one body. Christ too is like this; Christ is a single body, which has many parts; it is still one body, even though it is made up of different parts. In the same way, all of us, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether slaves or free, have been baptized into the one body by the same Spirit, and we have all been given the one Spirit to drink (1 Cor. 12: 12, 13).

4. Among all these gifts, love is the greatest. The Greek word 'agape' is an offspring of Christian gospel. This word effectively means the mercy and affection of our God who is selfless and ready to sacrifice. Paul gives a true definition of love: Love is patient and kind; it is not jealous or conceited or proud; love is not ill-mannered or selfish or irritable; love does not keep a record of wrongs; love is not happy with evil, but is happy with truth. Love never gives up; and its faith, hope and patience never fail (1 Cor. 13: 4 – 7).

The Holy Spirit provides power and discretion and leads to unity. The community is made strong and united. Holy Spirit ensures a communion life for the Church and binds it strongly. It is pertinent to note that 'strange language' is listed last among all gifts of the Spirit; at Corinth, over importance was given to 'strange language' that has caused bickering within the Church resulting in disharmony among believers. Paul told them strongly that more than strange languages, wisdom, faith and love are important. He treated the gift to speak God's messages more important than strange languages. (See 1 Cor. 14).

The Apostle explains the nature of Christian life in the Holy Spirit: "But the Spirit produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility and self control" (Gal. 5:22).

Symbols of the Holy Spirit:

Paul has used certain symbols to clarify the nature and actions of the invisible Holy Spirit, of which some deserve a deep study.

- a. Guarantee: 2 Cor. 5:5; Eph. 1:14 -- The Greek term "arabon" used in mercantile dealings denotes an agreement between the parties as having come to a settled decision on the price and other related matters. To confirm this, an agreement is signed. Using this term for the Holy Spirit is an indication to the rights we are entitled to in the future. In Modern Greek culture, "arabon" is used for wedding rings also. A ring symbolizes and confirms mutual understanding. Holy Spirit is a confirmation that we can have the feel of Heaven right now as also we can inherit it in its wholeness.
- b. Seal: 2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:14; 4:13 – The concept sealed in Spirit too is a metaphor taken from the business transactions. To ensure the safety of an object, there is a system of sealing it. A seal ascertains ownership also. In this sense, once we are sealed by Holy Spirit, all know whose possession we are. We are owned by God. Thus, we are safe from evil forces.

Exercise:

1. Read Romans chapter 8 and ascertain the insights you have there.
2. Distinguish between gifts of Spirit and fruits of Spirit.
3. Evaluate the Charismatic movement of these days based on the faith of St Paul.

Lesson 4

Ecclesiology

The anxiety about Church # Ecclesia means Church of God # Holy Men – House of God # Bride of Christ – Body of Christ

Once we have learnt about Christ and Holy Spirit, we have to look into the views of the Apostle on Church. Ecclesiology can be understood only in relation to these topics. This relation is evident when we say that Church is the body of Christ as well as fellowship in Holy Spirit.

The revelation Paul has about Church is spread over all of his epistles. The very purpose of his writing those epistles is to equip Christian believers to understand Church and do what they are called for. When he mentions about the discipline of Church (1 Cor. 5:1 – 6:11), moral life of the believers (Rom. 12, 13) and experience of worship (1 Cor. 12 – 14), this is quite clear. He has been attempting to advise believers for the spiritual enlightenment of the Church as also for its proper build up (1 Cor. 14:2 – 4:1; 1 Thess. 5:11).

Ecclesia:

Ecclesia is the word used to mean Church in Greek language. There is a Greek background and a Hebrew background for this. Of these two, the Hebrew one is dominant in Paul. The word used in Hebrew meaning proclamation of God's message is "Quahel" which is translated as Ecclesia in Septuagint version (Deuteronomy 9: 10: 18:16). As a community, Israel had the call to become 'people of God'. Once the very same term is used for identifying the Christian Church, it has obviously become the 'people of God' (Gal. 6:16; 3:7).

The word ecclesia is also used to indicate various communities; for example, assembly of worship (1 Cor. 11:18; 14:18, 19), the Christian community staying together at a place (1 Cor. 4:17; Philippians 4:15) and the universal Church involving all the believers (1 Cor. 6:4; Eph. 1:22; 3:10; 5:23). These are all denoted by Ecclesia.

Whenever there is a mention of the Church, Paul qualifies it in a meaningful terminology as the 'Church of God' (1 Cor. 1:2; 10:32; 15:9). This has an Old Testament background. Israel used to be called the people of God; though Church is a human set up, it has originated from God. God has formed the Church through Christ in Holy Spirit. The community formulated like this has to be under the control and authority of God; the above qualification of Paul (God's) reveals such responsibilities.

God's people or saints:

To denote Church, the term 'saints' or 'Gods' people' is very often used (Rom. 8:27; 12:13; 15:25; 1 Cor. 6:1; Philippians 1:4; 4:22). This term doesn't mean that all are perfect in holiness or righteousness. Had anyone called Paul as Saint Paul, he would have certainly objected to that. Yet, all Christians are saints in a sense. This is in the context that being in exclusive submission to God, Israel used to be called God's people (Exodus 19:6). This has to be understood as a community called

by God and submitted to God. Christian Church is called by God now in that place and hence, they are God's people or saints.

The theology about Church got developed in the later epistles of Paul. He got opportunities to meditate about the relation Christ was having with the Church and the basic tasks and responsibilities of the Church. The structural set up of Roman Empire and the government that controls it made Paul to think about the Church that has spread across the Empire and Jesus Christ who was leading it. This could be the reason why the epistles from the jails have deeper treatment on the Church. He has resorted to many metaphors for this.

God's House:

"You are God's building" (1 Cor. 3:9). "In Him, the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. 2:21). Look at the first statement: each and every believer is God's building. Based on this, the community of believers who come together becomes God's House. Glory of the Church is that God makes this House His dwelling place.

Christ's Bride:

Epistle to Ephesians says; "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her" (5:25). The idea that Christ is the bridegroom for the Church is expressed in 2 Cor. 11:2 also: "I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as pure virgin to him". Here, Christ is pictured as the bride groom, the Church as bride and Paul as the groom's helper.

There are Old Testament portions where Israel is considered as God's bride (Isaiah 54:5; Jeremiah 3:20). Prophets had strongly admonished the immoral behavior of this bride.

An inseparable relation is visualized in the metaphor of bride and bridegroom. This relation is one that has to be most trustworthy as if a covenant.

Church is the Body of Christ:

This is perhaps the most important vision of the Church. Paul has been picturing Church as a body in flesh right from his early epistles (1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12). "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it" (1 Cor. 12:27). Paul says this while advising members of the Church to keep themselves in mutual love, unity and harmony.

However, in his jail epistles, this metaphor of Church as the body of Christ is used to illustrate the relation between Christ and Church.

Many scholars have attempted to ascertain how this metaphor influenced Paul in the above context. Some have a feeling that this has come to him from Greek tradition. In stoic thoughts, there is an idea of the whole mankind being one body. But what Paul says is not one body, but the body of Christ.

Two reasons are pointed out here. (1) The Damascus experience where the question confronting Paul is "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Here, the believers' union with Christ is absolutely clear. The Apostle would have given a deep thinking over this. (2) The insight about Holy Qurbana is

expressed in the epistle to Corinthians. (This can be said to be earliest document on Holy Qurbana in the New Testament). "Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf" (1 Cor. 10; 16, 17). It is quite natural that by partaking in the Holy Body in Qurbana, all believers become one body. Paul would have come to this fascinating vision because of the sacrament of Holy Qurbana and his Christian experience.

"God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the Church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way" (Ephesians 1:22). He is the head of the body, the Church; he is the beginning" (Colossians 1:18). In these verses, the Apostle presents Christ as the head and the Church as the body. An elaborate explanation on these verses is not being attempted here. Yet, the truths involved in the thinking that Church is the body of Christ need to be understood. (1) There is an organic unity between head and body that they are inseparable; similarly, Church cannot survive without Christ. Christ too is not there without Church. In other words, the above verse reveals Church is the fullness of Christ. (2) During his public ministry, Christ had a body that is taken from Virgin Mary; likewise, he has a mystical body now that is the Church. Christ is alive through this body with which his act of redemption is continuing. The vision and inspiration of the mission of Church rise from this faith. (3) "There is one body and one Spirit, one Lord, one faith and one baptism" (Ephesians 4:4); this is the essence of unity. There can never be any sort of disintegration to that. That being the truth, different and scattered segments of the Church has to come together and strengthen the ecumenical activities. (4) Further, it also a need that the believers should extend help for each other. "Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body" (Eph. 4:25). The mutual relation shall be based on love and truth. (5) All movements of the church shall be in union with the Christ, the head. It is the head which should lead and control the body; human intellect and thoughts are not to be seen as important.

Exercise:

1. Make 1 Cor. 12 a subject of study and record the insights you get.
2. How can you explain the idea 'Church is the fullness of Christ'?
3. 'Church is the body of Christ'. What all truths are involved in this statement?

Lesson 5

About the Sacraments Holy Baptism and Holy Qurbana

Only Casual Comments # The Apostolic Tradition of Holy Baptism # Empowerment from Paul # Illustrations on Holy Qurbana in the Epistle to Corinthians

Holy baptism and Holy Qurbana are two sacraments with social significance. Paul has not made any direct comments on these two, possibly because both are well interwoven with the rituals and traditions within the Church. But he has attempted through his epistles to correct some of the wrong notions and procedures in certain segments of the Church by giving clarifications regarding their meanings and importance. Baptism is mentioned in many epistles, but Holy Qurbana is discussed only in the first epistle to Corinthians.

Holy Baptism in the early Church Tradition:

- (1) Baptism was in force right from the very beginning of the Church. Though Baptism was observed in Jewish tradition when gentiles were taken to the community as also in the services of John, the Baptist, Baptism in its true Christian perspective was established by Christ as evident from verses Matthew 28:16 – 20 and Mark 16:16.
- (2) Entry to Christian Church was through Baptism (Acts 2:41; 8:13; 8: 36 - 38; 9:19; 10:48)
- (3) The practice that was being followed during early days was baptizing in the name of Christ after proclaiming faith (Acts 2:38; 1 Cor. 1:13). Baptizing in the name of Holy Trinity was developed later (Matthew 28:16).
- (4) During the time of Paul, baptizing the children of Christian parents had no relevance. Gentiles were accepting the good news and were joining the Church. Families as a whole joining Christian Church (Acts 16:15, 32; 1 Cor. 1:16) which would have had children also.
- (5) Baptism was not something that was an external ritual; it was a source of spiritual blessings and experiences. In other words, Apostolic Church accepted Baptism as a Sacrament.
- (6) Gift of Holy Spirit was understood to be in relation with Baptism in as much as that whoever were baptized were believed to have received Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 8: 14,15; 10: 44 -48).

In general, Paul too would have accepted this tradition. He had thought that the Church members were quite aware of the faith and tradition about Baptism pretty well. For example, when Paul wrote to the Romans whom he had not visited till then (Rom. 1:13 – 15; 15: 22, 23), he asks, “Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” (Rom. 6:30). He proclaims that they all knew the faith about baptism.

Paul Strengthening the Faith on Baptism:

Paul has highlighted certain aspects of baptism that has not been reflected in the Christian faith dominant in Palestine.

Baptism into Christ: The Apostle has stressed more than once that baptism is being done for joining into Christ (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3). This is something that needs to be clarified. Here Christ doesn’t mean a single individual; instead, Christ is a corporate person involving many. When Christ and Adam are compared in Rom. 5: 15 – 21, they are representing two communities and the two communities are within them; the fallen mankind and the redeemed mankind.

The Apostle sees Christ as the one who has in him all those who are redeemed, a sort of inclusive man. Paul doesn’t mean a personal feeling of emotion while saying ‘joining into Christ in baptism’. In baptism, one is making his entry into a community that accepts the authority of Christ where his Lordship is prevailing all powerful. It is in this sense we have to understand the statement, “they (Israel) were all baptized into Moses” (1 Cor. 10:2).

Paul doesn't make any mention of the cleansing of sins or purification as taking place in baptism. Neither, he denies it, but the stress is on participation with Christ. Through baptism, we are joining with Christ. We are empathizing with the experiences of Christ. "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death" (Rom.6:4). ".....having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead" (Col. 2:12). A believer joins Christ in his death and burial that happened only once but experiences this in his life through baptism. In baptism, we are dying with Christ, we are buried with him and we are resurrected spiritually. From this point of time, we have the experience of living with Christ.

Renewal of Life: "In the same way, count yourself dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom.6:11). We are never to live in sin. The old man (the man immersed in sin) is dead in baptism and buried. The one who lives now is a new man who is reconciled in Christ. All facets of our life should be in line with that. The experience of baptism leads us to morality in day to day dealings.

Paul reminds the Corinthians what should be the nature of Christian life after getting baptized; they were a community of moral turpitude and spiritual pride. He warns them quoting the experiences of Israelites in the desert. "These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come" (refer 1 Cor. 10:1 -11).

Holy Qurbana:

The Apostle was compelled to write about Holy Qurbana seeing the misdeeds and bad traits in the Church of Corinth. This is the very first record of Holy Qurbana in the New Testament. The Gospel according to St Mark, earliest of all gospels mentioning the institution of Qurbana was written about fifteen years after this epistle to the Corinthians.

The Apostle after accepting the tradition prevailing in the Church on this subject gave need based additional explanations. He attached great importance to Holy Qurbana. The believers unite with Christ in baptism and that unity is strengthened and sustained through Holy Qurbana. This unity is a twofold one; one, with Christ and two, between the believers. Let us see what all aspects we can understand from Paul's first epistle to Corinthians about this.

1. Qurbana is the 'Christian Passover'. "Christ, our Passover lamb has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us keep the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor. 5: 7, 8). Here, there seems to be an indication about Holy Qurbana. It is explained how we have to participate in the Passover sacrifice.
2. "Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry" (1 Cor. 10:14). Relating this exhortation, we have the second mention of Holy Qurbana. The people of Corinth had a feeling that they were uniting with a god if the sacrificial food to that god is eaten. Based on that feeling, when we eat and drink from the Christ's table, we are partaking in his flesh and blood. We are entering into an active fellowship with Christ. After this, there are people participating in the table of evil spirits; thus, they are subjecting themselves to the power and authority of those spirits. This can never be allowed. Once you take part in the table of Christ, you shall never partake in a gentile god's table. Here, what is expressed about Holy Qurbana is a truth that it is a communion (Koinonia) in the flesh and blood of Christ. "Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the

bread we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf” (1 Cor. 10: 16, 17). It is not mentioned that this is a remembrance; Holy Qurbana is stated to be the body and blood of Christ beyond all doubts. The union with Christ is thus made possible through Holy Qurbana.

3. A further mention of Holy Qurbana comes up in the context of certain separatist moves within the Church. (Ref. 1 Cor. 11: 18 – 34). From this reading, we come to know that along with Holy Qurbana, a love feast too used to be observed. We have no alternative, but just guess what would have been happening in Corinth. The believers would have been assembling in a house large enough to accommodate a good gathering. They have been coming together on Sundays, which would have been working days then; there might not have been a fixed scheduled time for the worship. They start assembling by evening and their fellowship would have been extending to late night. (See Acts 20:7). Those who were reaching early would have had their love feast (Agape) early and would have finished their eating and drinking. It would not have been possible for the poor among the community to carry food and as such, they would have been isolated (11:22). Thus, a separatist tendency came up there. The Lord’s Table used to be observed after the love feast. Paul vehemently says that such an observance can never be said to be Lord’s Table. He admonished their observance as they were not accepting the true spirit of Holy Qurbana. In this context, Paul elaborates the observance of Lord’s Table on the last night at the Upper House in Jerusalem. He reveals the importance and significance of Holy Qurbana. There two aspects we have to a special note here.
 - a. The command that this has to be continued to be observed till our Lord comes back, has been conveyed through Paul. (There is no specific mention of this in the Gospels according to Mark and Matthew, but Luke carries it as he would have got it from Paul).
 - b. One should not participate in the Lord’s Table without himself being eligible for that; \ self introspection is very much necessary before that.

“Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on him. That is why many among you are weak and sick and a number of you have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 11: 27 – 30).

Exercise:

1. “He chose to give us birth through the word of truth” (James 1:18). How do we accept our rebirth through baptism considering this verse?
2. What are the differences opinion prevailing about baptism now? How can we justify the stand of our Church based on what Paul says?
3. How can we ensure wider partaking of the Holy Qurbana and to make it a more live feeling?

Lesson 6

Views of Paul on Eschatology

Jewish Background # The Age to come has come in Christ # What is the second Coming of Christ? How? # Signs Before Second Coming # Resurrection, Judgment, Fullness of Time

There are certain Christian denominations who attach too much of a sensitiveness to eschatological events and faith related to them. Such subjects dominate their speeches and preaching. Their favorite Biblical passages are the books of Daniel and Revelations. Yet, they highlight the teachings of St Paul too on this topic. However, Universal Churches are by and large not that seriously concerned about eschatological issues which may not be a right approach. In the last few lessons, we have been going through the main ideologies of Christian faith with the help of Paul's teachings in his epistles. As such, we shall see what his teachings on eschatology are as well.

Jewish Background:

To understand what Paul says about this clearly, we must have an idea about the Jewish background on the subject.

The Jews believed in two ages. They divided history into two namely, (a) the 'present age' that remains subjected to satanic forces and suffering from evil designs and (b) the 'age to come' which is subjected to total authority of God and also relying on Him.

They expected the 'age to come' as a golden era. Various prophecies contain pictures of such a good world. Days of material prosperity with the nature presenting its abundance (Hosea 2:18; Isaiah 32:15; 51:3), an era of peace with no wars, no controversies and no tensions (Isaiah 11: 6 - 9; 54:13) and a period of no pain, no illness and no death (Isaiah 23:24; 65:22). This is when God reigns supreme over everything.

From the present days where evil forces are in domination, there is a transformation to the golden era and this is made possible by God. This will be executed through the Messiah, His anointed one. The Jews were having a faith like this.

The Age to Come has Come:

Similar to what the writers of the four gospels have presented, Paul too proclaims that the 'age to come' has come in Jesus Christ. Only in relation to Christ one can understand the thoughts of Paul about eschatology.

The 'age to come has come' with Christ. The many of the blessings expected to be experienced in that age is now being experienced by those believers who live in Christ. A Christian believer has made his entry from death to life and from the world of darkness to Christ's world of light (Gal. 1:4; Col. 1:13). "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor. 5: 17). In a sense, he has a feeling of having risen from the dead. This is what comes as the experience in baptism (Rom. 6: 3; 4; Eph. 2:6).

In its true sense, the one who has been baptized is living in the experience of both the ages. Though he is saved from the control of evil and Satan, he is continuing his fight with them. Though he has risen from the dead and entered into life, his body continues to be susceptible to death and decay. Though he has made his entry to the Kingdom of God, he prays “thy kingdom come” and looks forward to its fullness in expectation. What he experiences now is incomplete and is only a part; from here, he enters into its fullness and wholesome experience with the second coming of Christ.

Second Coming of Christ:

The topic of the second coming of Christ has been expressed in all the epistles of Paul covering various facets of the topic authoritatively. Paul has used the qualification, “the Day of the Lord” as we see in the Old Testament (1 Thess. 5:2). Again Paul has been using terminologies such as ‘day of Lord Jesus Christ’ (1 Cor. 1:18; Philippians 1:6) and ‘that day’ (2 Thess. 1:10; 2 Tim. 1:18). These indicate the coming of Christ to unite the departed ones with those who are alive and to carry out the judgment (1Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:2).

Two terms used by Paul in the above context attracts our attention.

- (a) “Parousia” is a Greek word meaning ‘presence’ and ‘coming’. This was the word used when an emperor or such high dignitaries visit a place under their sovereignty. After resurrection, Jesus Christ in his full glory reigns from Heaven with authority and lordship. At the end of this age, he will come again to earth (Acts 1:11). That would be with power, glory and greatness (Matthew 24:27). This coming is to raise those who are in sleep and to join them with people here (1 Cor. 15:23; 2 Thess. 2:1). Along with this, all evil would be annihilated (2 Thess. 2:8).
- (b) “Apocalypse” is another Greek word that means ‘revelation’ or ‘unveiling’. This is the second word being used by Paul to denote second coming of Christ. After resurrection and glorification, Christ is enthroned at the right hand side of Father in Heaven wielding authority over all forces. “Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name” (Philippians 2:9). “He must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet” (1 Cor. 15:25). However, he has not yet revealed his kingship and exultation to the world now. At his second coming, these will be revealed. “At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Philippians 2:10, 11).

Faith in the second coming has to be understood in relation with the redemption process. Redemption is not for a few individuals, but for the whole mankind. Not only men, the entire creations, the entire universe come under the ambit of redemption. As such, the second coming of Jesus is a cosmic event. Christ who came to earth in the most humble manner to redeem the world would come again in full glory; he would establish his authority over everything in its wholeness. Thus, “God may be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28).

Events before the Second Coming:

Reflections of Paul’s faith in the second coming of Christ are seen mostly in the epistles to Thessalonians. In the first epistle, there is a mention of Christ coming to take the saints there and they are advised to wait expectantly for this (1 Thess. 5: 1 – 11). But some among them started thinking that the ‘day of the Lord’ has already come, may be because of heretic teachings from some

other sources or having misunderstood what was taught by Paul. Thus, Paul had to write a second epistle to them where an incident that would take place prior to the second coming is specifically pointed out; "Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for, that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God" (2 Thess. 2: 3, 4).

The power rising against God is presented in the Old Testament language (see Ezekiel 28:2; Isaiah 14: 13, 14). Who is pictured as man of lawlessness? In this context, chapter 13 of the Book of Revelation has mentioned an 'animal'. This is a power that opposes the power of God. This power can be called 'antichrist'. According to Paul, this power has been active right from those days (2 Thess. 2:7). But it is kept under check (2 Thess. 2:6). Once that check is relaxed, he would reveal himself with his full power.

Paul sees here a disturbed scenario where law and order situation is totally in shambles and political forces and controlling mechanisms disappear. Once this sort of a scene rules the world, Christ would appear again.

Resurrection and Judgment:

At the end of ages, Christ comes and the resurrection of believers takes place. The faith of resurrection could have been formulated only from a Hebrew background. "Lord Jesus Christ by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (Philippians 3:21). Paul says on another occasion, "He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you" (Rom. 8:11). Paul is not saying about soul without body; it is the transformed body he mentions. Man would be having a body that would match the 'new heaven and earth', the Kingdom of God. We are not attempting to discuss the nature of that body now. That body would be a Spiritual one. "By his power, God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also" (1 Cor. 6:14; 2 Cor. 4:14). Paul also says, "But Christ has indeed been raised the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20).

When Christ comes again, those who have fallen asleep would rise; those who are alive then would shed off their earthly bodies and instantly wear the new bodies. Thus they would be placed with Christ forever.

Paul makes mention of judgment too. "This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares" (Rom. 2:16). Make a reference to these portions too: Rom. 13:2; 1 Cor. 11:32; 1 Cor. 4: 5; 2 Thess. 2:12

All men would be judged based on the requirements written on their hearts (Rom. 2:14 – 16). There is one thing that is absolutely clear; the judgment of God would be righteous. In our Holy Qurbana, we do look forward to the second coming where all men would be rewarded for his actions.

Everything One in Christ:

The ultimate goal is to regain the unity and harmony in the wholeness of creation which was lost in sin. (Eph. 1:10). Redemption aims at establishment of peace through Christ to reconcile everything in heaven and earth with God. In the end, this would be realized; all forces standing in the way would be destroyed.

Paul says that the entire nature is eagerly looking forward to the eschatological events (Rom. 8:19 – 23) with expectation. There is no explanation needed here. It is meant that while the earthly bodies of humans are transformed, the whole nature too would undergo a transformation in relation to that. Paul visualizes here a scenario where man and nature are totally redeemed from evil and get into a union with Christ.

Exercise:

1. Explain the views of Paul on eschatology on the basis of 1 Cor. 15.
2. Read St Mark 13 and explain the second coming of our Lord as he has taught us.

Unit 3

Against Persecutions and Heresies

Preface:

We have already seen the epistles of Paul in general and the thoughts he has been advocating through them. Now, we shall proceed to other books of the New Testament. We are dividing them into two categories considering the circumstances under which they were written. (1) Those written under persecutions: These epistles are rich in exhortations to stand strong in persecutions and not to be panicky or afraid or not to back out. The epistle to Hebrews, the first epistle of Peter and the Book of Revelations belong to this category. (2) Those written under heretic teachings: This was a threat rising from within the Church. Many heretic teachings found place in the Church exposing believers to various kinds of dangers. Under such circumstances, epistles were written exhorting believers to stand strong in true faith. Second epistle of Peter, epistle of Jude and epistles of John can be considered under this.

In the next two lessons, we are discussing two epistles written in the background of persecution and their message.

Lesson 1

Epistle to Hebrews: Christ, Our High Priest

Who wrote this Epistle? # The Circumstances and purpose # Key Message: Christ Superior to all # Eternal High Priest

This is an epistle of difference that contains very high level thoughts about Christ and the means of redemption. The thoughts prioritized here is that Jesus Christ is a human in its fullness as also God in fullness and the eternal priest for mankind.

Who is the Author?

The traditional belief is that this is authored by none other than St Paul and we have verses 13:18, 19 and 23 of the epistle supplementing such a stand. However, there are a few other reasons making one a bit confused to accept Paul's authorship; let us, therefore, look into some of them.

1. The commencement of the epistle has no greetings whereas other epistles of Paul begin with wishes under his name to the recipients.
2. The structure and contents of this epistle is not quite like the usual pattern of Paul.
3. Certain specific ideas those are invariably part and parcel of Paul's epistles usually are not seen in this one. For example, justification through faith, union with Christ, new life in Holy Spirit and so on.
4. Jesus as a High Priest is an idea that has never been mentioned in any other epistles.
5. The language has some variations compared to Paul's usual writing style, particularly the proficiency in Greek.
6. There are reasons to believe that the writer is from the generation next to the Apostles on comparing with verses 2:3 and 4:2 with Galatians 1: 1 and 1:12.

Based on these reasons, it is cannot easily accepted that the epistle to Hebrews has come from Paul. There are very strong views that this epistle should not be counted with those of Paul. However, this is for sure, written by an intellect belonging to the tradition of Paul and his school of thinking. Scholars do pinpoint to a few as the possible author, but perhaps, what Origen says is sensible that God alone knows who has authored it.

The Circumstances and Purpose:

In the preface, we have seen that this was written during the days of persecution. The inner contents of the letter throw ample light to such thinking. "Sometimes, you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times, you stood side by side with those who were treated so. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions" (Hebrews 10:33, 34). "..... you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood" (12:4).

There are many who have been slipping out of the true feeling of faith. So the author poses this question: "how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?" (2:4). There are further words

revealing the seriousness of the issue. "It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the common age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace: (6: 4 – 6). Again, "but encourage one another daily, as long as it is Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness" (3:13).

Jewish religion was one having recognition from the Government of Rome. Christianity was not like that. When the believers of a religion not recognized by the rulers were persecuted, for reasons of safety, there would have been a situation of believers fleeing to Jewish religion.

The arguments coming up in this epistle have been effective counters to those tendencies. The Jewish religion and its rituals have been just a shadow of what has to come. The completion of all wishes, hopes and rituals of Old Testament is in Jesus Christ. The very same Christ opens a new path for us to God. The author advocates coming nearer to God choosing that path and standing close to Christ.

The heading of the epistle shows just to Hebrews. The recipient is not expressed clearly. May be, this is meant for Jewish Christians. Verse 13:24 conveys greetings from Italians to Hebrews and this could be an indication that the target group of this epistle would be the Churches in and around Rome.

Christ, Son of God, Superior to All:

The Christology seen in this epistle is really fascinating. Christ is presented as Son of God (1:2, 5; 4:14; 5:5). As the son, he inherits everything in totality. The angels worship him (1:6). The godliness of Son is revealed in all its absoluteness.

Along with these, his manhood too is clarified in its perfection. Barring sin, he has been tested similar to us in everything (4:15). The temptations confronted by him and the tribulations he had undergone have equipped him to help his people and be one with them.

Christ has been clearly positioned as superior to all beings. He is above angels (1:5 – 2:9). Their redemption also is through Christ. He is superior to Moses (3:1 – 4:13). Christ is the owner and the one who inherits all, but Moses, just a servant of the House.

Christ, the true High Priest:

This topic is the main point of discussion of this epistle. The author makes a comparison between the priesthood of Levite priests and that of Jesus Christ and establishes that Jesus Christ is indeed the true High Priest. Chapters 5 to 10 elaborately discuss this matter in all minute details. The inadequacy of Old Testament priesthood is pinpointed in a transparent manner and the superiority as well as effectiveness of the priesthood of Christ is revealed in a most convincing language. Levite priesthood was not sufficient to address the true issues of mankind. For atonement from the sin of human beings, just a sacrifice of lamb or ox did not possess the requisitioned power (10:4). Such sacrifice might be good for external ritualistic purification. The structure of the Tabernacle itself was keeping man farther to God rather than bringing him closer to God. The author repeats four times affirmatively that the Old Testament system could not lead man to perfection (7:11; 7:19; 9:9; 10:1). Coming to perfection is a subject that dominates the discussions in this epistle. This means achieving

Christian goals in life. This was something Levite priesthood could not execute, but Christ accomplished this perfectly.

Christ had all the eligibilities a priest was to have; he was designated by God like Aaron (5:5). Christ was a man in its perfection. "For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful High Priest in the service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people" (2:17). Though he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered" (5:80). "Such a High Priest meets our need – one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens" (7:26).

More glorified than Levite Priesthood:

To prove that Christ's priesthood is more glorified than Levite priesthood, the author establishes likeness with the order of Melchizedek. We read in Genesis 14: 17 – 20 about Abraham, in submission to the priesthood of Melchizedek, paying tithe of whatever he has. Based on this, the author argues that Abraham had accepted the glory of Melchizedek's priesthood and therefore the Levite, descended from Abraham also did likewise. There is no clue about the genealogy of Melchizedek and therefore, the inference is that his priesthood is eternal and not traditional.

The priesthood of Christ is not of successive nature, but eternal as he is not from the tribe of Levites. Melchizedek, the word meaning king of justice, was a King and a Priest. Likewise, Christ too is King and Priest.

The Levite priests were to offer sacrifices for their own sins also. This is not needed for Christ. The sacrifices of Levites were incomplete and therefore they were being repeated. The sacrifice of Christ being sufficient for atonement of sins has been offered once for all and not being repeated. The objects for Levite sacrifices were dump lambs and oxen; whereas Christ himself has been the object in his sacrifice. "And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (10:10). "And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood" (13:12). The Levite priests offered sacrifices inside man made earthly structures; Jesus Christ entered the heavenly structure that was not a man made one (9:12, 24).

This epistle explains the death of Christ and his act of redemption in the Old Testament background. Those who are familiar with the Old Testament sacrifices and those related to them would understand these easily. The call here is to come nearer to God through Christ and lead a life enjoying the presence of God.

Exercise:

1. Read Hebrews 1: 1 – 3; John 1:1 – 24; and Colossians 1:15 – 18 and find out common points of ideas.
2. Ascertain the approach to faith in this epistle.
3. In what ways are the priesthood of Christ more glorified than the Levite priesthood?

Lesson 2

Peter Exhorts those in Persecution (1 Peter)

Who is the Author? Structure and Purpose # Message – Theological # Related to Moral Life

The first epistle of Peter is widely considered as one of hope and encouragement. This is an exhortation to those in persecution to be courageous and be steady in mind. Moreover, this is very important in the theological point of view as well as based on the contents of exhortations. This epistle has more or less a structure and style similar to the epistles of Paul.

The author:

The epistle reveals the author as 'Peter, the Apostle of Jesus Christ', 'witness to the passion of Christ', 'a presbyter responsible to take care of God's folk of sheep' (1:1; 5:1, 2) and the like; also, it is mentioned that Mark is with him as his spiritual son (5:13).

These hints pinpoint to Apostle Peter, who has been one among the chosen twelve. He has been designated with the task to take care of Christ's folk of sheep (John 21:15ff). He was a witness to the passion of Christ as also to the resurrection (Acts 2:32; 10:41).

Church fathers without exception accepted this as written by Peter, but a few Protestant scholars of modern days have questioned this. Their contentions are briefed below.

- a. Deep knowledge in Greek Language: The one who has written this epistle is found to possess good skills in Greek and seems to be familiar with the Septuagint version of Old Testament which is a Greek text. The vocabulary is rich and the style is simple, seemingly quite impossible for a fisherman of Galilee to acquire. The reply to this observation is that the thoughts and ideas of Peter would have been written by Silas in his own language as said in the epistle itself (5: 12).
- b. Mention about Persecution: There are frequent mentions about persecution throughout this epistle (1: 6, 7; 2: 12, 19 - 20; 4: 12 – 16; 5:10). Possibly, such wide spread persecutions took place during the reigns of Emperor Domitian (AD 81 -96) or Trajan (AD 98 – 117) Peter was not alive then. Here, one has to count that these persecutions could be of AD 64 – 68 by Emperor Nero. If so, certainly, Peter has authored this.
- c. Gentile Christian Church: There is no evidence of Peter having any relation with Gentile Churches of Asia Minor; as such, the reasoning justifying that he has written to those churches lacks clarity. Against this argument of the Protestant scholars, one has to understand that Peter is the Apostle for the whole Christian Church. Therefore, he had the authority to advise any Church at any time of their difficulties through letters or otherwise to encourage and strengthen them. It can be inferred that Peter would have written to Churches of Asia Minor under such circumstances.

Once we examine the theology expressed in the epistle, it can be seen that there are reflections of the early stages of the Church. Further, on comparing the speeches of Peter we read in the Book of Acts with the ideas exhorted in this epistle, there are striking ideological alignments and similarities. These are reasons good enough to affirm the authorship of Peter.

Structure and Purpose:

A careful study of the contents reveals that this epistle conveys moral exhortations to Christian believers. These are pieces of advice in the moral and spiritual angles for those getting prepared for baptism. This inference is justified by the direct and indirect references to baptism (1:3, 23; 2:2; 3:18) in the epistle. During the days of Apostles, perhaps certain clear cut methodologies would have been formulated for teaching catechumens and those who were readying themselves for baptism. Even in the epistles of Paul, there are reflections of these aspects particularly in his letters to Ephesians and Colossians. In these epistles, the relation believers are expected to have with the society and the government is explained in detail; family relations are also discussed.

The first part of the epistle contains moral exhortations (1:3 – 4:11). But there are more references on persecution in the second part (4:22 – 5:13). It can, therefore, be understood that the epistle is written for the sake of those believers of Asia Minor making them recall the exhortations they have received earlier during their preparations for baptism and adding up further pieces of advice that now they are being persecuted.

The statement “She, who is in Babylon, chosen together with you” (5: 13) indicates Rome. In the Book of Revelations, Rome is indicated as Babylon. The name of Mark is also mentioned in 5:13. As known through tradition, Mark has been with Peter in Rome. Therefore, it can also be inferred that this epistle is written from Rome in AD 66 or so.

The Message:

We have already seen that mainly, exhortations needed for keeping moral ethics in life and the necessary commands for that are given in this epistle. This writer interweaves moral advice with Christian theology and presents them to readers. Christian doctrines and moral advice are seen intermingled. It is true that ethics have no relevance unless it is related with theology.

- a. Theological Hypothesis: (1) About Jesus Christ- He was there from the very beginning and his Spirit spoke through prophets (1:11). He was without blemish (1:19; 2:22) and suffered tribulations and insults as a man (2:21 ff; 4:1, 13). As satisfaction of prophecies, he died shedding his blood. Through his passion and death, mankind received atonement of sins (1:18, 19; 2:21; 3:18). Not only that, they were justified and got entry to God (3:18). After his death, he preached the good news to those who were in spirit imprisoned (3:19 – 20; 4:6). Christ’s acts of redemption met with total success through his resurrection. Believers are being born again in baptism through that resurrection (1:3; 3:21). At the end of ages, Christ would appear again and believers would have fullness of redemption and others would have punishment (1:5 -7; 4:4; 5:1, 4; 4:5, 17). (2) The Holy Church – Peter is not using the term ‘ecclesia’. However, there is a vision of Church throughout the epistle. Christian Church in reality is the new Israel. Old Israel lost way by missing the cornerstone that was Christ. The Church came in to that place. The comments about Israel: “Chosen people, royal priesthood, holy nation, people belonging to God” (Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:9). The Christian Church earned these names. Church is the true House of God. This is built up with living stones and is the living spiritual house (2:5). As a holy priesthood, the Church offers spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God and to His pleasure. This Church is ruled by Presbyters (5:1). That position used to be equivalent to that of Bishops then. They take care of God’s flock of

sheep in discipline and good advice. The references to baptism were discussed earlier. Through baptism, one is born again (1:3). We are also led to salvation (3:21). Baptism is not a washing for external purification, but it cleanses us internally and leads us to lasting relation with God.

- b. Advices on Ethics: There are two things stressed here. (1) In tribulations, stand firm-Tribulations are to be accepted as life experiences for believers because, the world is against them. Therefore, ill treatments of the society or community have to be faced happily and with restraint. Believers are safe before God's judgment. There is a Christian insight on tribulations here. Through tribulations, we are refined like gold by fire (1:7). We can rejoice in sufferings because we are participating in Christ's tribulations through our sufferings. "But rejoice that you participate in the suffering of Christ" (4:13). (2) Act Good- This exhortation is repeated four times (2:15, 20; 3:6, 17). This is something that has to be expressed as different from the life of Gentiles. The high moral ethics of believers would be a good witnessing for non believers. "For it is God's will that by doing good deeds, you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men" (2:15). "Because they will see how pure and reverent your conduct is" (3:1).

Christian influence should be revealed in all spheres of life. We should be obedient and respectful to the nation and rulers (2: 13, 14). We have to be cautious about family relationships. Husband and wife are jointly entitled to grace for life and should behave in tune with that. Slaves and masters should have cordial relations. The sign of Christian ethics should be love.

Exercise:

1. Explain the Christian outlook on sufferings based on this epistle.
2. How is the call for purity in life expressed here?
3. Read 3: 1- 7 and sum up the pieces of advice to husbands and wives.

Lesson 3

Against Heresies (2 Peter, Jude)

Preface # Relation between 2 Peter and Jude # relation between the 1st and 2nd Epistles of Peter # Peter himself is the Author? # Circumstances and Purpose # Epistle of Jude

Preface:

In the previous lessons, we have seen epistles written in the background of persecutions (Hebrews, 1 Peter). There is one more in that category, the Book of Revelations. We will discuss that in a subsequent lesson.

What we are discussing now are epistles written in the background of heresies; that too, epistles other than those of Paul, belonging to general category. We shall therefore learn the 2nd epistle of Peter and the one of Jude together. There is a reason for this that there are close similarities between them as also that they have some sort of a close relation. It is quite clear that one has relied on the other. 'Peter' would have written relying on Jude. It would be a good exercise to compare Jude 4 – 11 with 2 Peter 2: 11-16 making a few changes in the beginning.

The difference between 1 Peter and 2 Peter:

1. The key message of 1 Peter is Hope whereas it is tribulations and persecutions in 2 Peter. The central theme here revolves around 'wisdom'. Its significance is in the background of heresies.
2. 1 Peter is rich in quotes and references from Old Testament whereas 2 Peter doesn't contain them much.
3. 1 Peter gives importance to Christ's death and resurrection whereas 2 Peter concentrates on the present glory of Christ.

2nd Epistle of Peter- Is it authored by Peter himself?

Peter claims himself the authorship of this epistle with biographical references where he mentions himself Simon Peter and not just Peter as he has done in the 1st epistle. Claiming to be an Apostle of Jesus Christ (1:1), he has made references to his being a witness to the Transfiguration (1:16); he also makes a mention that he has been familiar with the letters of dear brother Paul (3:16) and that he has already written a letter earlier (3:1). Again, there are instances of his pointing out that he has been nearing the end of his life (1:13, 14). All the above references are pointing to Peter as the author. However, these are not sufficient to convince the scholastic world. The Syrian Churches had included this in the New Testament Canon only by the 5th century.

There are a few reasons to doubt the authorship of Peter, which are briefed here. (a) There are reasonably good differences in the style of language used in this epistle compared to the first. (b) Ideological differences can also be pointed out. (c) The chances that Peter had written this are very remote because of its reliance to the epistle of Jude which was written much later. (d) The heresy being attacked here doesn't belong to the days of Peter.

Some of the scholars suggest the period of this epistle to 2nd century; however, a more acceptable time is around AD 80 after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple. A Jewish Christian grown up in the Greek culture would have written this epistle and attributed its authorship to Peter to earn general acceptance to the work, probably belonging to the lineage of Peter's disciples. There used to be a practice during those days to write in the name of people who were better known and respectable in the community. This was not having any abnormality in the culture prevailing those days.

Nature of Heresies:

We can understand the nature of those heresies from a close study of the arguments raised in the epistle. Just similar to false prophets coming up in Israel, heretics are coming up from within the Christian Church. It has been said about them: (1) they are advocating changes in faith, but really

deceiving in nature; (2) they renounce our Lord; (3) they invite destruction (2:1, 2); (4) they live in immorality; (5) they are greedy and speak tactfully to their advantage (2:3).

These heresies can be considered as close to Gnosticism. They teach that there can be no relation of substance and spirit and therefore, whatever you do with your body would not affect your spirit. This thinking led them to immoral acts and even adultery. "With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable" (2:14). "For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of human nature, they entice people" (2:18).

Another error that can be pointed out against Gnosticism is that it has not believed in eschatology. Thus, the propagators of this heresy deny the eschatological faith and the second coming of our Lord. This could be the reason why there is a lengthy discourse on eschatology in chapter 3. The word Parousia is used here.

The Gnostics had raised a question sarcastically; "Where is the 'coming' (Parousia) he promised?" (3:3) they say, 'after the fathers fall asleep, all remain standstill as they were at the beginning of creation'. Thus they scoffed at the eschatological belief.

Many of the Christians believed that with the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in AD 70, the world too would come to an end and our Lord would appear. But this did not happen as they had been expecting. Under such circumstances, a satisfactory explanation was needed which is given here through this epistle. The time as counted by God is different from what man counts. "With the Lord, a day is like thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day" (3:8). "He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (3:9). "So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him" (Matthew 24:44).

The writer points out two things about the day of the Lord. (1) That would be the occasion for judgment (2) Then, a new set up would be formed where justice prevails. For believers, judgment would not be frightening; it would mark their entry into eternity. But for the evil and heretics, doom awaits. The entire nature would be destructed by fire and a new world and order would come up.

The epistle of Jude:

Till the 6th century, this epistle was not taken to the New Testament canon of Syrian Church. The background of this epistle too is the same as that of 2nd epistle of Peter. The beginning of the epistle says about the author 'servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James'. This Jude is not the one among the twelve Apostles, but the one mentioned among the 'brothers of Jesus'. It is believed that he was the brother of James, the first Bishop of Jerusalem; the one who is said to be the brother of our Lord and named Jude is certainly the author of this; though there are people questioning it, we need not give any importance to that.

Jude is writing against the heretics of Gnosticism: he makes his stand firm to protect true faith (verse 3), calling the heretics as those denying Jesus Christ (verse 4), Gnostics greedy after power who belittle angels of God (verse 18), claiming to be enlightened in spirit but in reality, not possessing spirit (verse 19), leading immoral life engaging in adultery (verse 4, 12). In 2 Peter too, these points are covered.

It is a matter of special interest that Jude has relied on Apocryphal books; he has quoted from the Book of Enoch. In verse 14, we read, "Enoch, the seventh from Adam" which is a reproduction of Enoch 1:9. It is pertinent to raise a question here whether Jude had accepted the Book of Enoch as Scripture.

Another quote is from the book named 'Assumption of Moses' as we read in verse 9. This book is not available to us now, but Clement of Alexandria and his disciple Origen were quite familiar with this. At the time Moses died, Michael came to retrieve his body which was objected by Satan arguing that indeed he had the right over the body because Moses was a murderer. This is something not narrated in Old Testament.

Jude had no reservations to quote the above two passages from Apocryphal books. Therefore, those of the modern day scholars who hold pre conceived notions about Apocryphal books would do a good service by taking note of these.

Exercise:

1. While quoting Jude's epistle, what are the changes Peter has made?
2. What are the ways and means employed by heretics to squeeze into the mainstream of the true Church? How can we confront them?
3. What are the expressive teachings of Gnosticism?

Lesson 4

Epistles of John

Heresy of Docetism # John's Argument against Docetism # Connecting John's Epistles with the Gospel according to him # The Key Message

We are discussing all the three epistles of John together. The contents of these three reveal relations between them; the connection they have with the gospel according to John too cannot be forgotten.

1st Epistle:

The treatment of the topic is attractive in style and simple to comprehend; but on entering into the text deeply, the thoughts revealed are highly scholastic. There are no traditional greetings in this epistle. Also, there are no clues as to who has written and to whom. It can be inferred that this is meant for Churches in Asia Minor in general. There are no references to individuals in this epistle. Another significant point worthy to note is that there are no quotes from the Old Testament. The reason for this could be that the readers have been Greek Christians and that the heresies would have originated from Gnosticism.

This epistle carries no comments or references to persecutions hinting that the days when this was penned was a time the church was experiencing peace and tranquility. The period AD 90 to 96 was like that. The resistance and threats from Jews had subsided by that time. But the Church had to address another threat caused on account of heretic teachings of certain elements within the Church and the resultant schisms. Problems cropped up in the areas of ethics and spirituality. The situation Church had to face was one where the true and pure faith was being contaminated.

What was the Heresy?

Gnosticism was something that was spread across the length and breadth of Asia Minor. In the lesson on the gospel according to St John discussed in the previous volume, the faith related basics about Gnosticism were explained.

1. Matter or substance is evil in itself. God that is spirit alone is good. Therefore, there cannot be any relationship possible between God and the substance centered world. Because of this, it was impossible that God took flesh as man. The heretics referred to in the epistle denied incarnation of Christ (2:22; 4:1). Christ was simply 'felt' to people as a man; in reality, he was not man. This 'feeling theory' propagated by them came to be known as 'Docetism'. The thought process not accepting the coming of Jesus Christ in flesh (1 John 4:2) 'felt' Christ walking and eating and so on, but really, it was 'not true'. Against this, John writes at the very beginning, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life" (1 John 1:1). These heretics denied Christ's passion and death. They would accept the baptism of Christ, but they do not accept that his death is necessary for redemption of man. Their stand is that he came in water and not in blood. John resists this argument vehemently. Jesus Christ is the one who has come in water and blood; "this is the one who came by water and blood – Jesus Christ" (5:6). John doesn't say anything about resurrection of Christ. He illustrates mainly passion of Christ and his death on the cross. "The blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin" (1:7). "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (2:2; 4:10). By denying Jesus Christ has come in flesh, his being Son of God too is denied (4:15; 5:5) Arguing that Son of God cannot associate with the world of matter or substance, they are denying Jesus being the Christ (2:22). They are harping on their stand that Christ who is from heaven cannot join with Jesus who is from world. But, during the moment of Baptism in Jordan, there was a temporary union of the two, but at the time of death, Christ simply left Jesus. This hypothesis was strongly objected by John; he goes on to explain the truth behind Son of God taking flesh as man and later, his death on the cross.
2. They see God as light and substance or matter as darkness. According to them, salvation has to be earned through gnosis or wisdom. This cannot be achieved with intellect; instead, it is through an emotional enlightening in relation with God who is Light. Such people move from the world of darkness to the experience of light; they live in light. Darkness has no authority over them. Gnostics were holding these sorts of pride and self esteem in their hearts. They viewed ordinary Christians who are not of their level with contempt. Listen to what John says countering these theories. "But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth" (2:20). Christian believers earn true wisdom from the Holy Spirit; Spirit lives in all. Spirit is not given to a selected few. Spirit advises them in all and leads them the right

way. "Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness" (2:9). Those who have no love but possess self esteem and pride stay in darkness. Their arguments are senseless. They have another hypothesis that those who have earned gnosis are not susceptible to sin as they are at a level far above that. John cuts down this argument too. "If, then, we say that we have fellowship with him, yet at the same time live in darkness, we are lying both in our words and in our actions. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and there is no truth in us. If we say that we have not sinned, we make God out to be a liar, and his word is not in us" (1:6, 8, 10).

Based on what we have seen above, we can understand the nature of heresies John addressed. Mainly, those heresies are cutting off our faith in Christ and affecting our ethics.

Connections with the Gospel according to John:

The first epistle and the gospel have close resemblances. The language used as well as expression of contents appears quite familiar.

Both commence with explanations on Logos. The purpose of this epistle and the gospel are also similar. The purpose for which the gospel was written has been clearly mentioned in verse 20:31 like this; "But these have been written in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through faith in him you may have life". The epistle 5:13 reads as: "I am writing this to you so that you may know that you have eternal life – you that believe in the Son of God". These appear to have been written one after the other.

The language phrases used are also strikingly similar such as, abiding, witnessing, born from God, obey the command and take care of the Word and many more like that.

There are similarities in thoughts expressed also. In both the gospel and the epistle, Christ is addressed as the Word, the only son and the savior. In both these, the one who came in flesh as the truth of incarnation is given adequate stress. Participating in the Christian experience is pictured as entry from darkness to light and from death to life in both. The contrasts between light and darkness, life and death, truth and untruth, sons of God and sons of Satan are quite obvious in both the gospel and the epistle. The actions of Holy Spirit that leads us to truth and light are elaborated in both.

Considering such similarities aplenty, it can be concluded pretty well that the Apostle John who has written the gospel has written the epistle as well. It is believed that this was written towards the end of first century around AD 90.

Message:

The message can be summarized in two words. (1) Light (2) Love. The first part from 1:5 – 3:10 centers on the thought 'God is Light'; the second part 3:11 – 5:21 revolves around the theme 'God is love'.

Jesus Christ is the true light. Those who live in Christ under the guidance of Holy Spirit stay away from darkness and stick on to holiness and righteousness. They have no reconciliation with sin in their life. Since his seed lives in us, they can never continue in sin.

John is known as the Apostle of love and has used the verbal form of love 28 times in this epistle. The sum total of Christian life is nothing but love. The purpose of life should be to love God and our brothers leaving aside the love for worldly desire (4:20, 21). We have come out of death and this is evidenced in our love (3:14). We love because God first loved us (4:19).

2nd Epistle:

The second and third epistles are very short. Both these are meant for specific Churches. The writer calls himself a Presbyter in both these. Because of this, there is an opinion that the one who has written the second and third epistles is different from the one who wrote the first. A change in language style is also pointed out. Let us not enter into such aspects now. The second epistle is addressed to 'The Elect Lady and children' which seems to be meaning a Church. In verse 13, the mention "your dear Sister" indicates Church from where it is written.

The children of Church are now subjected to teachings of heretics who have squeezed in. Those deceivers who do not accept that Jesus has come as a human being (verse 7) and those who do not stay with the teachings of Christ (verse 9) are heretics and what they preach sow danger. As such, in this epistle, the writer calls upon the readers not to have any sort of associations with those heretics and ensure to maintain true faith consistently.

3rd Epistle:

The third epistle is addressed to Gaius. The base for this epistle is the differences of opinion between the Apostle and Diotrephes who is heading a Church. The people sent to that Church by the Apostle are not accepted by Diotrephes; but Church members who have accepted them were out casted from the Church. However he could not take Gaius to his side. The writer has good faith in Gaius. The sincere believers of the Church are standing by Gaius. Gaius is one who has been helping missionaries and doing services in true spirits. He has been asked through this letter to continue such services and assistances. Demetrius about whom there is reference in this letter would be one of those missionaries.

There are no comments about heresies in this epistle; may be written prior to heretic teachings got spread.

Exercise:

1. Find out the definitions given in the 1st epistle about God.
2. Who are anti Christs? What are their faiths?
3. What are the similarities in these with the gospel according to John?

Lesson 5

Faith and Acts: Epistle of James

Nature of the Epistle in General # Authored by James, brother of our Lord # Message: Faith and Acts # Controlling Tongue # Prayers: Anointing the Sick

General Nature:

This is an epistle where the author exhorts the readers that there must be some sort of a relation between one's faith and life. As such, directives on morality assume importance in this. Call for Christian equality and social justice sounds in this epistle very prominently. More than an epistle, this possesses the qualities for an exhortation. Again, this looks closer and indebted to Old Testament books Proverbs, Wisdom and Ecclesiastes. Though many ideas from Old Testament are taken, quotes are very rare. Moreover, the Sermon on the Mount has a fascinating relation to this. May be, this epistle has its base with the oral traditions of the gospel.

Proponent of reformist movement Martin Luther has not given any value to this epistle. He called this a pack of hay. His reasoning is that this doesn't contain the message of good news. There is no mention of the death on the cross or resurrection. The text deals mainly with the Law and its related acts. These are all the points of criticism raised by Luther. Once we make an attempt to understand this epistle in its true spirit, it gets revealed that there is no sense in his criticism.

Author:

In the preface, it is written, "From James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ". There is more than one James in New Testament. Of the twelve Apostles, two were known in this name; son of Zebedee and son of Alphaeus (Mark 3:17, 18; Matthew 19:3, 4; Luke 6: 14, 15). Among these two, the first one has been assassinated by Agrippa in AD 44. We do not have much information about James, son of Alphaeus. Mark 5:40 makes a mention of this small James, but that is all. Thus, it is presumed in general that this epistle is authored by James also known as the brother of our Lord (Mark 6:3; Matthew 13:58). The long standing tradition of the Church too accepts this.

He has been the Episcopa of the Church of Jerusalem and counted as one of the pillars of the Church (Galatians 2:9). It was this James who presided over the Jerusalem Synod and formulated a common stand for the Church on various issues (Acts 5: 13 – 21). It is also read in 1 Cor. 15:7 that our Lord after resurrection appeared before him. Possibly, this would have led him to his transformation.

Clement of Alexandria and others has recorded his martyrdom; he was assassinated in AD 62 and was buried in Jerusalem itself.

The circumstances for writing this:

It has to be presumed that a situation has arisen where lot of importance has been attached to practicing of faith in the Christian preaching and neglecting the law of life. It is not sure whether this has been a result of misinterpretation of what has been taught by Paul. Whatever may that be, a social situation where faith has been highlighted and ethics of life downgraded, would have caused

the inspiration for writing this epistle. Moreover, when the Jewish Christians were harassed by traditional Jews, there was a need to encourage them and sustain them in faith.

The time of writing this epistle is not very sure; yet, it is reasonably thought to be between AD 57 and AD 62. The author might have had an opportunity to have seen some epistles of Paul. This epistle carries the feeling that Christ's second coming would be in the near future (5:7 – 9). There is nothing worth noting in this letter on the development of Christology; in other words, the epistle moves along a Jewish nature. There is a mention that this is addressed to the scattered twelve tribes of Israel. This is suggestive of the Jews living outside Palestine. But what is really meant here are those Christian believers living scattered among the Gentiles. Their place of worship has been called Synagogue (2:2). These are all indications that the time of this epistle has been the early days when the ill feelings and hatred in the Church towards Jews used to be not that sharp.

Message in the Epistle:

There are discussions on issues those are practically relevant. Different topics coming up are not connected one another. Let us see below a few of such main issues.

- a. Faith and Action: We should have a faith that prompts us to do acts of love to others. The true expression of faith is evident in one's acts. Faith without good deeds doesn't have life in it. Some of us may raise a question here: Is James contradicting what has been taught by Paul? Paul has told on many occasions that one is not justified exclusively through actions; we need faith (Rom. 3:20; 5:1; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8). And when we read James, it may sound as if he is talking against Paul. "One person has faith, another has actions'. My answer is, "show me how anyone can have faith without actions. I will show you my faith by my actions" (3:18). Certain people has misinterpreted what has been taught by Paul and argued that for salvation, faith alone would suffice; there is no need for any deeds of goodness. Their inference here is totally false. There are no contradictions between what have been taught by Paul and the thoughts of James. The meanings of words 'faith' and 'action' are different for them. By 'faith', Paul means submission to God after accepting the good news; but James means 'faith' as the faith in 'One God' taught by the Jewish Rabbis. Read James 2:19. Thus, faith is a personal submission to God for Paul whereas it is a sort of transformation within for James. Similarly, Paul takes 'action' as rituals according to Law. According to him, by just following rituals one cannot reconcile with God. Now, James means good deeds of love to others when he says action. A person in need should be provided what he needs; a good word alone will not suffice. (James 2:15). This point has been highlighted by Paul also through his epistles. Paul gives importance to the faith of Abraham, but James value Abraham's good deeds more. The faith of Abraham was deep and strong. It was expressive through his deeds. This is what is expected of all.
- b. Christian Equality and Brotherly Love: May be, it is James who strongly clamor for social justice when we come to New Testament. True, one cannot forget Luke in this connection. The worth of a person is not to be judged based on wealth, physical look or worldly fame as the criterion (2:1 – 4). James advocates his view that all should be seen impartially and with an equitable approach. In 5: 1- 6, James reminds the readers about the perishable nature of wealth and gives a call to maintain an employer – employee relationship in its right perspective. The Apostle admonishes the system where the employee is exploited by not

being paid reasonable wages. Justice at all levels should be protected; let us not slip into injustice; this message is important in the contemporary world.

- a. Control your Tongue: This is being written to a community where the preachers had special position and honor (3:1); they are reminded not to be submitted to excess talks or senseless talks and the need to control tongues is stressed by the Apostle. Tongue may be a very small organ of the human body, but it is stronger than others to do good or evil. In 3:11 and 12 he is comparing tongue with the cradle of a horse or the rudder of a ship or an untamed animal. We have to be very careful that our tongue causes evil to others. We don't get sweet water and bitter water from the same spring. A grape wine doesn't yield a fig fruit. Likewise, our tongue should be controlled that it doesn't become a cause for evil. We have to perform good acts with humility and wisdom.
- b. Prayer – Anointing of the Sick: Read 5: 13 -18. The Christian life should be one of prayers and praises. In tribulations, it must be possible for us to pray with deep faith and hope; in our days of contentment, we must rejoice in God and praise Him. The exhortation of Paul is significant here. "Sing psalms, hymns, sacred songs; sing to God with thanksgiving in your hearts" (Col. 3:16; also see Eph. 5: 19). "Is there anyone who is ill? He should send for the Church elders, who will pray for him and rub olive oil on him in the name of the Lord" (5:14). When our Lord sent the Apostles to countryside, they had healed many sick rubbing oil on them (Mark 6:13). Based on these verses, the anointment of oil on the sick was founded in the Church as a sacrament. It is also very important for the priests of the Church to visit the sick and pray for them.

In the epistle of James, theological aspects are not dealt with. The contents are very important practical aspects every Christian believer should be aware of. Such things are presented in a very simple style using similes and illustrations.

Exercise:

1. What all things are stated in this epistle about tests?
2. What is the call given by James towards social justice?
3. What sort of advice is given by James to control one's tongue?

Lesson 6

Book of Revelations

A Controversial Book # Apocalyptic Books # Revelation to John # The Message

This would be the most controversial book in the New Testament. The fact that this was not included in the New Testament canon of Syrian Church itself is an indication of the attitude Church was having on this book. In the lectionary of the Church, readings from the Book of Revelation had not found a place for long; but the revised lectionary chose the first three chapters of this book to be

read in the churches during worship. On the other hand, Western Churches had been accepting this book as scripture right from the 2nd century. Also, it is worth noting that the canon formulated by Mar Athanasius of Alexandria had included Book of Revelation also.

This book stands different from the other books of Holy Bible in its presentation as also in its contents. This book is filled with complex visions, not so common way of presentations, unfamiliar metaphors and unusual symbolisms. Consequently, a reader finds it too difficult to comprehend what are being intended to be communicated. This has caused formulations of personal interpretations; such interpretations have given rise to the birth of many new generation fellowships and church factions. They have, using their own interpretations, come out with peculiar eschatological hypotheses.

The Book of Revelation was penned during the days of persecution. Thus, it carries a characteristic approach suiting such a scenario. During persecutions, a literary system was developed among the Jews called apocalyptic writings. The Revelation to John falls in that category. We must therefore know some basics of such literary works which would enable us to understand the Book of Revelations better.

Apocalyptic Writings:

The Greek word 'Apocalypse' means revealing or unveiling; the happenings of future known to God alone are being revealed. People undergoing persecutions and tribulations would be very eager to know what is in store for them in the future. It was under such circumstances, the first apocalyptic work found light among the Jews in the 2nd century BC. This happened to be the days of invasion and the cruel persecutions from Antiochus Epiphanes over the Jewish territories. This work is familiar to us as the Book of Daniel. Following this, similar works came out among the Jews as well as in the Christian Church. The Book of Enoch, Assumption of Moses, 2 Ezra and Covenants of Twelve Fathers are examples for this.

1. In all these books, the message being conveyed is not in straight language; instead, code language is used as also symbols and metaphors. Strange looking beings, animals, meaningful numbers are all used to convey the message. The readers then were familiar with these symbols and hence could understand what is conveyed without difficulties. But generations later, they turned too complex to comprehend.
2. Fight between good and evil or the fight between God and Satan is what is going on. The acts of Satan result in persecutions for the children of God. However, at the end, God crushes Satan to submission and the total authority of God is established. The faithful people there start enjoying salvation and freedom of joy.

All these incidents briefed above are seen in the revelation to John also.

Revelation of John:

It has been mentioned thrice that John is the one who has written this (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8). In the other works of John we have studied so far, it shall be recalled that his name has not been revealed. But the one who wrote this doesn't claim to be the Apostle or a Presbyter. However, it is specified that this John has been in fellowship with Jesus in his passion and sufferings as also in his Kingdom.

There is no evidence to show that the writer is John, the Apostle. The language, style of presentation and also the thoughts coming up here is having marked differences with the pattern we are familiar with the gospel according to John or his epistles. This variation was pinpointed by Mar Dionysius of Alexandria in AD 250 itself.

Despite such differences, the tradition of the Church holds that this is written by the Apostle John. Justin Martyr has recorded in AD 145: "This is written by John, one of the Apostles of Christ". Irenaios too has confirmed this and continuous tradition subscribe to the same view.

This was written during a period the Christians were being persecuted (2:9; 3:9; 13:1, 2, 14ff; 18:6; 17:20). The torture was set in motion by the Roman rulers. The proclamation that all the subjects should worship the idol of the Empire was rejected by the Christians and this was the cause behind unleashing cruel persecutions. John was sent in exile to Patmos island (1:10). All churches of Asia Minor were undergoing these tortures without exception. It was under such circumstances John had the heavenly vision at Patmos and wrote down the Book of Revelation.

The persecution referred here took place during the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian (AD 81 to 96). He had instituted Emperor Worship with all seriousness spreading it throughout the empire and demanded himself being addressed as Lord and God by his subjects.

Contents:

Since there are quite a lot of unusual characteristics, it is necessary that we have a clear picture of the contents of the book.

1	Preface	Chapter 1
2	Letters to the seven Churches	Chapters 2 & 3
3	Vision of the Heaven	Chapters 4 & 5
4	Three series of punishments; seven Seals; seven Trumpets; seven Bowls	Chapters 6 - 16
5	Fall of Rome	Chapters 17 – 20:3
6	The Thousand Years Rule	Chapter 20: 4 - 10
7	Final Judgment	Chapter 20: 11 -15
8	Second Death	Chapters 21 – 22:5
9	Conclusion	Chapter 22: 6 - 21

The First Vision (1:9 – 3:22)

John has the vision Christ in his highest esteem and full glorification in the middle of seven lamps (1:12ff). This indicates the presence of our Lord with the Churches on earth. Those seven Churches within Asia Minor can be understood in its literary sense for writing letters; not that there are no churches elsewhere, but the number seven comes to indicate wholeness. The contents of these letters are significant for all Churches for all ages.

The Second Vision (4:1 – 16:21)

Now John has the vision of the Heavenly Throne with God on that holding a scroll with seven seals. The only one who can open the scroll is the lion of Judea tribe, the slain lamb who is the Lord (4:1-

11). This is followed by the narration of three series of punishments numbering seven each. The incidents happening on the earth are pictured through symbols of seal, trumpet and bowl. Before the seven trumpets are blown, two sects are seen to appear. [1] 1, 44,000 people who are sealed on their forehead coming as 12,000 each from the twelve tribes (7:3). [2] Countless people coming from all segments and tribes who are redeemed from great tribulations persecutions (7:9 – 17).

The subject of this second vision is the confrontation between God and Satan. Satan as the red monstrous serpent attempts to annihilate the Messiah, but his efforts turn fruitless (12:7ff). Then he turns his ire on the earth to destroy it totally (12:7). To execute his plans, he befriends two animals. They are ones who themselves do not obey God and work to alienate human souls away from God (13: 6 – 15). The cruel animals and their cronies reign over the humans for a certain period (13:7, 8, 16, and 17).

The Third Vision (17:1 – 21:8)

The great whore Babylon (Rome) turns supreme over the kings of earth (17: 1 – 18). Following this, Babylon is subjected to its punishment and destruction (18: 1- 24). Then come up a big hymn of praise and rejoicing (19: 1 – 5).

The continuation of this vision is the triumph of God over evil forces (19: 6 – 10). The victory of Christ annihilates the animals and their cronies; the monstrous serpent is chained and locked in abyss (20: 1- 3). Christ along with his saints rules for a thousand years. When Satan is freed, he commences his fights again and gets defeated forever. This is followed by the second resurrection and judgment (20: 11 – 15). Then the new heaven and the new earth appear (21: 1 – 8). The redeemed ones rejoice in their fellowship with God (21: 3 – 4).

The Fourth Vision (21:9 – 22:5)

This is the picture of New Jerusalem where the Lamb lives with the bride. The Book ends with a call to all men to receive the life of God (22:17).

How do we interpret?

1. One set of scholars hold the view that the incidents those took place at the time of writing this book are presented through metaphors and symbols.
2. Another school of thinking is that whatever is mentioned here are eschatological prophecies. The eschatological incidents are said to be visible here in their fullness.
3. Yet another group of scholars are of the view that this book reveals the history of the Church from beginning to the end.
4. It can be observed that the events of history right from God taking flesh up to the end of the world are presented in general without bothering about chronology; the confrontation between Christ and opposing forces commenced immediately after God took flesh as a man and this war would last till the end of the world. Whatever confrontations are there within the history of the Church are basically of the same character: the fight between good and evil.

We should not attribute literal meanings to metaphors and symbols. We have to look for their inner sense and ascertain the spiritual message contained therein. For example, the sealed scroll is the

fascinating mysteries possessed by God. The number 1,000 means a big number whereas the number 7 represents fullness. The length, breadth and height are equal indicates wholeness.

The main Message:

The message here contains hope and success. At the end, it is goodness and not evil that prevails. Even if there is a temporary reign of Satan and his associates, at the end Christ would over power them.

The future is in God's control and not with man; prevalence of evil in one's life is not as a punishment, but it is an occasion to refine life styles. The future of mankind moves in relation with God.

The Christian Church has to confront harassments and clashes in normal course. Satan and the opposing forces in the world can propagate false exhortations and problems. But the victory of Christ and Church is certain; a new heaven and new earth would come up. A new life order would be established.

Exercise:

1. What are the peculiarities of apocalyptic writings?
2. In what all ways are the Book of Revelation interpreted?
3. What is the basic message of this book?

Unit 4

Issues coming up while Studying New Testament

Lesson 1

Church and Secular Government

Preface – Advised by Jesus # Views of Peter and Paul # Task Today

The Christian Church has responsibilities towards the nation and to its government. There is no justification for any stand that is not positive towards the system of governance of the country. However, today there are varying views on this. It can be observed that at Vatican, they have evolved a system akin to national governance and matching systems of administrations have been put in place. The system that is prevailing in England is that the Head of the nation is also Head of the Church. However, in the United States, while drafting the constitution, provisions were made that Church is different from the nation that there is no need to relate the two. There are certain church segments those resort to a stand that secular governments are working as Satan's associates and therefore there shall be no relation between the two. 'Jehovah Witnesses' is such a segment. They do not exercise citizen's obligation to the nation such as exercising their franchise or take up job as soldiers. They claim to be citizens of that nation directly under the governance of Jehovah. They have obligations only to God. Based on such varying views among different segments of church

factions, it would be necessary that this subject has to be deeply analyzed and studied in the New Testament background.

Advised by Jesus:

Teachings of Jesus on this topic can be understood through the gospels. There is no evidence of his having spoken anything against the civilian government. On the other hand, he has been advocating that our obligations and responsibilities towards the civil administration system should be honored.

Those were days that the Jewish people were virtually suffocating under the Roman imperialism. There used to be moves of resurgence against Rome here and there; the Jews were looking forward to interference of Jesus in as much as that he would come out with his comments against them and it was in this background, the Pharisees approached him seeking his views on payment of tax to Caesar. They expected Jesus to speak against Rome or else the people would turn against him. But the answer Jesus gave was to show him a silver coin and asked them to look at it and see whose face and name was there. They had to admit that it was Caesar's; Jesus told them that whatever was Caesar's should be Caesar's and whatever was God's should be God's. (Mark 12: 15 – 17).

This answer revealed that Jesus was not siding with the Zealots who were denying payment of taxes to Roman administration. Though the people were heavily burdened by the taxation, Jesus suggested paying taxes. This symbolizes his submission to prevailing rules of the land. Another aspect is worth mentioning here. There was a system in force then that in the Roman occupied territories, if a Roman soldier asks a local person to carry his luggage, he was obliged to do so. It was in this background, Jesus advised people to walk two miles with a person if he wanted to walk with him one mile. It was meant here to do service more than what was asked for. Another thing revealed by Jesus was that the Jewish people who rejected God's call would be punished by God using the Roman armed forces (Luke 21: 20 – 24). When Pilate was examining him, he said, "You have authority over me only because it was given to you by God" (John 19: 11). Thus Jesus revealed that political power has God's consent and permission. The ideas we come across in the epistles of Apostles are also in line with this.

Views of Peter and Paul:

The relevant Biblical portions throwing light to the subject of our discussion are: Rom. 13: 1 – 7; 1Tim. 2: 1 – 4; Titus 3: 1; 1 Peter 2: 13, 15. These verses pin point the similarities in the views between Peter and Paul on the topic. There used to be scholars who opined that one would have relied on the other in this matter, but now the accepted view is that the general feelings on the subject prevailed among the Apostles are reflected here separately in the epistles.

The historical background of the early Church can be understood from the Book of Acts, but nowhere there is any mention of the Church clashing with the Roman administration. On the other hand, there seems to be maintenance of good relations. When Peter says, "We must obey God and not men" (Acts 5:29) he is not against Roman rulers. He has been targeting the authorities of Jewish synagogues against their cruel persecutions. He has never expressed any disobedience or opposition to the Roman administrators.

It would be necessary for us to go deep into the above referred Biblical verses to clearly understand the views of Apostles. On such an examination, the following ideas are revealed.

- a. Each Christian has an obligation to the government. This obligation is certainly the will of God about the people of God. "Everyone must obey the state authorities, because no authority exists without God's permission, and the existing authorities have been put there by God. Whoever opposes the existing authority opposes what God has ordered" (Rom. 13: 1, 2). Here, the word authority means civil administrative powers and not of the spiritual powers of heaven like rulers and authorities. The interpretation given by Jehovah Witnesses is as hinted above or to be more specific, to obey only the heavenly spiritual powers. But Paul has never advised to be submissive to spiritual powers here; on the other hand, he says, we have to fight against them. "For we are not fighting against human beings, but against the wicked spiritual forces in the heavenly world, the rulers, authorities and cosmic powers of this dark age". (Eph. 6:12).
- b. The statements we read in the epistle to Romans as also the first epistle of Peter clarify that there were no clashes or oppositions between the Church and the Roman government then. The comment we see in the epistle of Peter is not addressing the government threat but the society that has been belittling Church as also their way of mocking at Christians.
- c. Paul explains that governments are God appointed. They stand to protect those who do good deeds and punish those who do evil. As such, we should not oppose governments. Believers are expected to be in submission to governments. What is established by God has to be respected. But a question might come up here; when the government acts in a manner detrimental to those who are good and not punishing the wicked ones, or when it seen that the government proceeds in such a way that they stand against the laws of God or against basic ethics, are we expected to respect that government? During the reign of Nazis in Germany, the Christian Church was confronting this issue. They respected their conscience and opposed Hitler.
- d. Paul stipulates that the believers should pray for governments and authorities (1 Tim. 2: 1 – 4). "First of all, then, I urge that petitions, requests and thanks giving be offered to God for all people; for kings and all others who are in authority, that we may live a quiet and peaceful life with all reverence towards God and with proper conduct". Prayers are needed that they are capable enough to govern keeping in mind the welfare of people. It is based on this principle that in our services of worships, prayers are included from the very beginning for our rulers. The third 'Tub den' in our Holy Qurbana is one such prayer. It is necessary that we pray for all rulers who govern us including the President and Prime Minister.
- e. Paul has been suggesting that tax should be paid to authorities. "That is also why you pay taxes, because the authorities are working for God when they fulfill their duties. Pay, then, what you owe them; pay them your personal and property taxes, and show respect and honor for them all" (13: 6, 7). As indicated earlier, the Jews were holding strong objections and protests to pay taxes to the Romans. The Zealots had openly denied tax payments. But what Paul exhorts is not to align with the zealots on this issue but to pay taxes. In the Church of Rome, there would be Jews who were converted to Christianity and Paul would have been targeting them also in his exhortation. The Church of Rome was located at the headquarters of Roman Empire. If they had openly come out against payment of taxes at Rome, there would have been possibilities of far reaching consequences. Only on paying taxes, one can expect protection and favors from the nation.
- f. Once we evaluate the views of Paul, it becomes obvious that the nation or the administration do not have any absolute authority. They are subjected to the authority of

God and are acting as His servants. Not only that, no worldly government can bring up Kingdom of God as reality. As such, believers should look forward, beyond the present scenario, with faith and hope to Eschatological era.

- g. What Paul says in Rom. 13: 1- 7 has to be understood minutely. The nation and its system of governance should be respected and people should be subjected to them. However, total obedience is only for one and that is to God. Whatever Paul says here is keeping in mind the obligations of people to honor and respect the civil government, but not more than God who alone is the Supreme Power. As we read in Acts 5: 29, “we must obey God and not man”. These words of Peter are really meaningful in the light of our above discussions.

Changes in the relations with the Roman Government:

There have been substantial changes in the relationship with Roman government from the days of writing the epistle to Romans to the time of writing the Book of Revelation. Book of Revelation has been written centered on eschatological views. Here, the Roman Empire is not for glorification of goodness or for punishment of evil deeds. It is a wicked force opposing heaven and God’s people (13: 6, 7). Satan has been influencing and strengthening Roman government (13:2). For this reason, God turns against it. Thus, the significance of worldly governance disappears. Instead, Kingdom of Christ and Father comes up (11:15). This is what the writer of Revelation pinpoints.

Task Today:

When we think of the task before us now, we should not look forward to the thoughts formulated in line with the cruel persecutions the believers have been confronting and in relation to the influence of eschatological faith and expectations we have come across. Instead, we have to give priority to the truths discussed above based on what have been taught by Peter and Paul.

- We do possess a dual citizenship; one of our nation and the other of Kingdom of Heaven. We shall carry out our responsibilities looking into both of these.
- Only God has power over everything and His Lordship prevails always. The governing machineries of the earth are to carry out their responsibilities in submission to God and according to God’s commands.
- It becomes necessary to oppose a government when it moves against the basic rights and goals of its subjects; such governments then would be acting on orders from Satan. Many countries of Latin America and many autocratic systems in African nations are of this category. This is precisely the reason why the Churches raise their voice against them.

Exercise:

1. Is it right to oppose the existing government? What are the situations to oppose it?
2. Should the citizens of the Kingdom of God be submissive to worldly governments and be obedient to them? Narrate your reasons.
3. Is it right for the Church leadership to enter politics? What roles a Church can take up?

Lesson 2

Christian Church and Other Religions

India, the Land of Various Religions # The Attitude and Approach of Jesus # In the Apostolic Church # Views of Paul # What should be our Approach?

India is a country which is home for many religions. Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism and Buddhism are religions originated and grew up here. Islam and Christianity came here from abroad. The Mughal rule accelerated the growth of Islam in our country. The supremacy of European countries and their colonial culture were helpful for the growth of Christianity, but now Christians are just less than 3% of the total population of the country and are a minority community.

What should be our attitude and approach to the society around us and to other religions? What are the insights we have from the New Testament on this?

In Gospels:

In Matthew 10: 5, 6 we read Jesus sending his disciples with this instruction "Do not go to any Gentile territory or any Samaritan towns. Instead, you are to go to the lost sheep of the people of Israel". We see here that Jesus has ignored Gentiles and Samaritans not allowing any contact with them. However, this is not a final instruction. At that stage of their discipleship, they have not been spiritually equipped to go to outsiders. This is the reason why they are asked to confine their services within Israelites alone. It is pertinent to note here that after his death and resurrection the disciples were asked to go to all categories of people and take them to their fold (Matthew 28:29). On another occasion, Jesus has told them, "But when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will be filled with power, and you will be witnesses for me in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). When he said he was the light of the world, it was revealed that his mission was for the whole world.

Once we look through the services of Jesus, it can be seen that mostly, he has been in the midst of Jews; contacts with others have been rare. However, he has shown that those outside the Jewish community are also eligible for his grace and that he loves them too. He has a lengthy dialogue with a Samaritan woman who is from another religion and sect. The woman is slowly led to have faith in him. He has never spoken downgrading or admonishing other religions. But he reveals the unmatched position he holds and what his mission is. He clarified, "I am the way, the truth and the life; no one goes to the Father except by me" (John 10:9, 14:6).

Among his teachings, two metaphors Jesus has given about the Church attract attention. (1) You are the salt of earth (2) You are the light of the world (Matthew 5: 13, 14). These show us the way how we should respond to those who are outside the Church. The Qumran community has been there during the time of our Lord, but they have been living a secluded life with no contacts with others. Jesus wants the Christians be different and with this thinking, the above two metaphors were illustrated. Salt by dissolving with other materials reveals its character. There is no use for it to stay secluded. Likewise, by shining on all objects light reveals its character. This teaches us that the light

emanating from its source Jesus Christ who is the true light, should lighten all others and this is what should happen in Church.

In the Apostolic Church:

Christian Church was born in the cradle of Jewish religion. But too soon, they separated and very often acted in enmity. When the Church spread its wings beyond the Jewish religion, it had to confront other religions in the Greco Roman Diaspora as also other philosophies. Though the Church was a minor community then, its influence and enlightening characteristics attracted many.

The evangelist nature of the Church was seen to be its character. It was accepted that introducing the mission of Christ among other religions and communities as a basic responsibility of the Church. This is something that has to be taken up by all members.

Church was convinced of its task to act like salt dissolving in the society. But it was also necessary to keep the basic characteristics intact. "Do not try to work together as equals with unbelievers, for it cannot be done. How can right and wrong be partners? How can light and darkness live together? How can Christ and the devil agree? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?" (2 Cor. 6: 14, 15). On another occasion, Paul says, "so you have nothing at all to do with such people" (Eph. 5:7). Here what is highlighted is that though we are in this world, we are to be separated to the world.

In the Apostolic Church, the idol worship of Gentile religions and the immoral tendencies going hand in hand with it were subjected to severe criticism. The Apostles never closed their eyes against that, nor was it seen lightly. In Rom. 1:18 – 32, we can read Paul's vehement attack on such practices. The Church stood really tough with no mood to reconcile on two aspects; one, in matters related to faith and two, in the moral conduct of the believers. The quality of Christian Church has to be revealed in these two vital facets.

The views of Paul:

Paul who was brought up in Jewish religion believed in 'one God'. When Christ was revealed to him, he saw the full nature of divine content living in Christ (Col. 2:9). All fundamental laws and beliefs attain their completion in Christ. Bringing all creation together, everything in heaven and on earth, with Christ as head was revealed to him (Eph. 1:9). He believed that all would proclaim Jesus Christ as the Lord to the glory of God, the Father (Philippians 2:9). The faith of Paul in its wholesome totality was formulated from his revelation of Christ.

The goal of Paul's life was to lead all to Christ. For that, he lived outside the Jewish Law to win those who were outside Law (1Cor. 9:21). Sticking on to basic principles, he tried to understand the views and faiths of others. Having been brought up at Tarsus, he was familiar with Greek Philosophical thoughts. Because of this he could quote Greek philosophers of the past while arguing with their scholars at Areopagus in Athens. He said, 'we live in him, we move in him and we are with him'. He further quoted, 'we are his offspring'.

This illustrates that we have to learn the philosophies and beliefs of other religions. John too was following the very same systems. He accepted the concept of 'Logos' which was very familiar to the Greek. With this he successfully interpreted Jesus. So our strategy should not be to turn against the

truths of other religions, but try to pick up useful insights if they would be helpful to understand and preach Christ effectively.

Our Approach:

- a. We have to live our daily life in association with others. In our business field and official scenarios, we have to have relations with many including those from other religions. Therefore, we have to maintain a high moral status which should be attractive to them and influencing them. "In this way, you will win respect of those who are not believers, and you will not have to depend on anyone for what you need" (1 Thess. 4:12).
- b. We should never reconcile on moral life or our traditional faith; but we shall be cooperative with others in social relations and maintain a positive mind.
- c. In our normal life, ensure that no opportunity is lost to be a good witness. "Be wise in the way you act towards those who are not believers, making good use of every opportunity you have" (Col. 4:5).
- d. Any chance you have to say about Christian faith to others should not be wasted. After saying to deal with others with wisdom and propriety, Paul advises: "Your speech should always be pleasant and interesting, and you should know how to give the right answer to everyone" (Col. 4:6). What Peter has said about this is also similar: "Be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you, but do it with gentleness and kindness" (1 Peter 3:15).
- e. Paul further exhorts everyone to be friendly and peaceful. "Do everything possible on your part to live in peace with everybody" (Rom. 12:18). We cannot force others to be peaceful; we can control us and remain calm and cool so that confrontations can be avoided and peace can be sustained.

Exercise:

1. What are the means to enhance religious tolerance?
2. How do you respond to the thinking that all religions are different means to truth?
3. Shree Narayana Guru had said, "Whatever is one's religion man should be good". Explain this concept of the Guru in the background our above discussions.

Lesson 3

Church and Discipline

Discipline and meaning thereof # What Christ has advised # In the Book of Acts # Directives from Paul # In other Epistles # Conclusion

The Christian Church is defined as the body of Christ and fellowship with Holy Spirit. Presence of Spirit brings freedom. If so, what is the relevance for discipline or punishment within the Church?

However it has to be remembered that Church, apart from being the body of Christ, is also an organization managed by men. When such an organization is continuing in the material world, discipline and punishments are relevant. It is essential for the sustenance of the Church.

The term discipline is different from something related to punishment, but it is associated with exhortation, nourishment, education etc from its Greek equivalent. At the same time, the Hebrew equivalent has slight differences in meaning like goading, rectification, cleaning and the like. Reading the Book of Proverbs, we come across messages like these.

There are two dimensions for the term discipline; they are (1) self discipline – this is something one has to achieve personally. External pressures or influence from others may not be helpful. One can experience this with his union with Christ and the consequent new life. Paul presents self control as a fruit of Holy Spirit. “But the Spirit produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility and self control” (Gal. 5:22). What Paul says about self discipline also attracts attention. ‘The one who wages a war observes forsaking..... my body is subjected to torture and made a slave’ The second one is (2) social dimension – this has to be understood in the social background. If one does something wrong, it has its impacts not on him alone, but there would be reflections thereof as also reactions in the society. Therefore, it is necessary to initiate right steps to protect the integration of the society, its purity and unity. Again, it might be necessary to correct the one who did such wrongs and thus society has to be reinstated in its proper order.

There are two goals behind discipline. One is for taking a defense that there should not be a drift to doing wrong or towards immoralities for which one has to take care and exercise vigil. Second goal is of a solution. Here, corrective measures are initiated to set right the mistakes and efforts are taken to reestablish the relationship; the one who has done the wrong is being reinstated.

In Christian Church discipline comes up mainly in two areas; one, in doctrines and two, in ethics. Deviation from true faith has to be viewed very seriously and on high priority. Fall in life too is very serious. Such falls can cause adverse impact on Christian community. To retain the purity and individuality of the Church, discipline is very crucial. The Christian community has to retain its set character as it is a community that has been set apart. However, very often it is seen that the characteristics of Laodicea Church is found to be retained everywhere; neither cold nor hot.

Advice of Christ:

What we can look into mainly in this context are the verses Matthew 18: 15, 16. Just before these verses, metaphor of the lost sheep is illustrated and verses 15 and 16 are bearing direct connection to that. The lost sheep is traced and located by God and is reinstated; we have to be exactly the same when we come across a brother who has erred in life. Let us look into the following points. (a) The one against whom a wrong is done should approach in person and in private the one who did the wrong and convince him of the facts. The chance that the one who did the wrong may take initiative to confess his act is not denied here. (b) In case the one who erred accepts his fault, he should be pardoned and the friendly relationship should be reinstated. On the other hand, if he declines to accept his fault, the service of two witnesses can be utilized. (c) Even then the one who erred refuses to accept his fault, he should be brought before the Church for an examination with the help of those witnesses. If he is agreeable to the orders of the Church after such examination, matter ends there fare and square. (d) If the order of the Church is declined by that person, then

appropriate action of punishment can be initiated. He would be expelled from the fellowship of the Church.

Look at the way our Lord is taking personal care over these matters; see the meticulous systems he has been putting in place for the sake of proper conduct of the affairs of Church. He has been very particular that the unity and integrity of the Church is sustained. Following this, we read about the authority entrusted to the Apostles to enforce proper discipline within the Church. "And so I tell all of you: what you prohibit on earth will be prohibited in heaven, and what you permit on earth will be permitted in Heaven" (Matthew 18:18). Many interpret the word 'prohibit' as expelling an accused from the fellowship through initiation of disciplinary proceedings; similarly, 'permit' means reinstating the accused into the Church following his repentance.

Matters of Discipline seen recorded in the Book of Acts:

The system that has been prevailing during the early days has been to baptize those who believe the good news. No time has been set aside for learning faith in its depth. We may have apprehensions whether that has been the right way to be followed. However, the interferences of Holy Spirit have been so strong and lively that the danger of withdrawal has not been causing concerns.

Chapter 5 of the Book of Acts narrates the incident involving Ananias and Sapphira. Can we accept this on the face of it? Was not the punishment meted out to them too harsh? During the early stages of the Church, it has been necessary that tough discipline be enforced causing a fear complex without which the growth and progress of the Church would have had adverse impacts. More than the toughness of punishments, what catches our attention here is the high spiritual vision and ethics among the believers. The body of Church has been immunized from cancerous symptoms such as deceit and cheating through such actions. The Book of Acts 13:8 -12; 16:16 – 18; 19:11 – 20 are verses explaining instances where the authority of Jesus is revealed openly in punishing black magician Simon and other men and women engaged in actions contradicting Holy Spirit.

Directives from Paul:

1 Thess. 4:6 contain Paul's admonition against sexual misdeeds. Similarly 1 Thess. 5:14 and 2 Thess. 3:6 are strong warnings against those who spend their time lazily without doing any work, but at the same time engage themselves interfering with the life of others. Sometimes, continuous admonitions may not be sufficient to address the wrong doings; it is quite in order to take the toughest stand and expel the concerned men and women from the fellowship of the Church (2 Thess. 3: 14, 15).

"But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel that is different from the one we preached to you, may he be condemned to hell" (Gal. 1: 8, 9). However, we are not told of any disciplinary actions initiated here. The directives from Paul to the Church in Corinth shows the need for discipline; not bothering about the seriousness of it, there are people who participate in the Lord's Table and Paul says, "many of you are weak and ill and several have died" (1 Cor. 11:30). When the people denied the directives of Paul, he asks, "What do you need? How should I come to

you, with a rod in hand or with love and a meek spirit?" The term 'rod' means his apostolic authority. Again, Paul has prohibited contacts with immoral people in chapter 5. But the Church in Corinth never bothered to follow his advice. "I am told that a man is sleeping with his step mother!" "The man who has done such a thing should be expelled from your fellowship" (1 Cor. 5: 1, 2). However, the Church was too casual on matters of these sorts. Paul was really perturbed. When an accused is ordered to be handed over to Satan for physical torture, two things are revealed. The accused is alienated from Church fellowship; this is to mark him for Satan's authority. Once he realizes his fault and repents sincerely, he can be taken back and reinstated.

Another incident is mentioned in 2 Cor. 2: 5 – 11. There are scholars who doubt that what is mentioned here could be the very same incident covered in 2 Corinthians chapter 5. What is covered here seems to be something bad done against Paul by someone. The Church, through the laid down procedure, punished the accused by expelling him from the fellowship; but Paul is asking him to be taken back. Later, in 2 Cor. 13: 1 – 3, yet another wrong action and punishment thereof is discussed. For the moment, Paul is of the view that his direct admonition would be sufficient.

In the Pastoral Epistles too, there are references to initiation of disciplinary actions. The Apostle did so in the issues of Hymenaeus and Alexander. Read and compare 1 Tim. 1:20 and 2 Tim. 2: 17, 18. Any allegations against the Presbyters of the Church should have two or three witnesses for that. Once proved guilty, the Presbyter should be admonished in public before the Church. Only by such stern actions, the purity of the people of God can be sustained (1 Tim. 5: 19, 20). In the epistle to Titus, Paul exhorts to admonish wrong advices (Titus 1: 9, 13). Anyone who encourages schism in the Church shall be counseled wisdom once or twice and if there no change in him, he should be avoided (3:10).

Other Epistles:

There is mention about punishment in the Epistle to Hebrews, but that is not as initiated by the Church; instead, our heavenly Father is goading and punishing his children (Heb. 12: 5 - 11). Such punishments help to achieve strength and maturity.

In the epistles of John, we see heretics squeezing into the Church; those who do not accept the godliness and manliness of Christ are called anti Christs. (1 John 2: 22, 23). Some such elements are already out of the Church and as such, no actions are required now (1 John 2: 18, 19). We are not supposed to be hosts to heretics (2 John 10, 11). Further, Diotrephes who has been standing against the Church leadership is condemned that he shall not be a model to anyone (3 John 9, 10).

Conclusion:

1. There must be a sort of guidelines or bye laws for believers to follow the doctrines, but absence of such a document would make it difficult to ensure proper discipline. Possibly, such a document would have been formulated through exhortations.
2. The early Church faced the situation tough to impose proper discipline. It was not easy to have just evaluations of issues; independent decision making was not comfortable. Thus, a tough stand could not be taken by the leadership of the Church on various issues.

3. The apostolic authority is a very important factor. Of course, there were some elements questioning such authority, but the majority of Church members stood with Paul and thus disciplinary actions could be implemented successfully.
4. Once we find a believer on the wrong side, he should be counseled in love by his fellow believers; they should influence him to come out of his wrong deeds. If such efforts are successful, there would not be any need for the Church leadership to interfere and initiate disciplinary actions.
5. During the days of Apostles, the system of expulsion from the Church fellowship was in force; but how intense was it is not quite clear. Expelling one from a Church at one place was tantamount to his being expelled from Churches at all centers. Mainly, he was made to stay away from taking part in Holy Qurbana. There was hope that he be reinstated subject to his sincere repentance.
6. In the Corinth issue, it is seen that the entire Church sat together and took disciplinary action. But there were changes in the procedure later. From the second century, the responsibility of initiation of disciplinary proceedings is found vested with the leadership including the respective Episcopas.
7. Punishment shall never be an end in itself. It should lead the accused to goodness and his reinstatement through his correcting himself.

Exercise:

1. Discuss the role of discipline in the Church.
2. What are the limitations to disciplinary proceedings today?
3. What should disciplinary proceedings aim at?

Lesson 4

Role of Women in Church

Relevance of the topic # Presence of Women in the advice of Jesus and in his Approach #
Women in the New Testament Church # Women as viewed by Paul # Women in today's
Church #

Of late, there have been increased convictions regarding the role of women and their position in the society. Women liberation movements founded in western countries, the year 1975 observed as

Women's Year, increased participation of women in the socio educational fields are all encouraging symptoms of women becoming more prominent than they were for long.

There has been loud thinking of their role in Churches too. Women have been elevated to priesthood in many protestant Churches. In the Roman Church, there are women who are scholastically well equipped in theological subjects and are engaged in Seminaries as teachers. In the Orthodox Church too, initiatives are there on women empowerment and their increased activities for the Church. Under such a background, let us look into the insights we have on the subject.

Presence of Women in the teachings of Jesus and in his Approach:

Jesus never had any aversion on women contrary to the stands prevailing among contemporary Rabbis. Rabbis were not mentioning women in their metaphors, but Jesus very often made them central characters. The woman kneading flour to make bread, the woman searching for the lost coin, the woman grinding grains, the ten virgins waiting to receive the bride groom, the widow continuously harassing a judge for getting justice are all examples.

Discussing the issue of divorce, Jesus suggested both man and woman be viewed equally; he did not accept a stand that man can do anything as he pleased (Matthew 19: 2- 9).

The approach of Jesus was quite revolutionary compared to the normal attitude that was prevailing then. In the then Jewish culture, women were treated lowly. There were men who used to glorify God by praises and thanks giving that he was not born as a Gentile or as a woman. Participation of women was very minimal in public worships. They were treated badly in social gatherings also. Their individuality was never respected; they were treated like slaves or even like equipments. It is under such a background we should understand the approach of Jesus.

Women were included in the circle of Christ's disciples. They always followed Jesus. With their savings, they were assisting Jesus and his apostles (Luke 8:3). In the gospel according to Luke, the importance given by Jesus to women is highlighted. Luke's theological view has played a part behind this. According to the views of Luke, women represent the marginalized segments of the society standing before God. Also, they represent the human sect who listens to the Word of God with concentration (Luke 1:30, 2:19).

Jesus talked to a Samaritan woman despite the distance Jews were keeping from them; not only that, he reveals to her that he is indeed the Messiah (John 4:26). This leads her undertaking a big mission. Jesus allowed a woman despite her being a sinner to sit by his feet; he even redeemed her from her sins (Luke 7:36 – 50). He permitted another woman to sit near his feet and learn the divine truths from him. Moreover, he praised her spiritual thirst (Luke 10: 38 – 42).

Jesus revealed that he was the Messiah for the first time to a woman; likewise, the truth about him that he was 'resurrection and life' was also revealed to a woman. When a Gentile woman approached him he praised her for her depth in faith (Mark 7: 24 – 30). By Jewish Law, a woman who is bleeding is impure; but when such a woman showed the courage, albeit fear, to go near him, she was comforted and healed (Mark 5: 24 – 34).

During the time of crucifixion of Jesus, his disciples including the apostles ran away and hid themselves, but the faithful women followed him and was witnesses to all the events till he was buried (Mark 15: 40, 41; John 9:25).

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the basic truth of Christianity and a few women were chosen to witness that event (John 20: 17, 18). In Jewish tradition, any witnessing done by women doesn't carry legal sanctity; may be, knowing that, these women were purposefully called up as witnesses to resurrection.

Women in New Testament Church:

Women held crucial roles in the New Testament Church. The main reason for this was the encouragement they had from Jesus. Women were with men in all activities of Church life. When the Apostles were waiting for the Holy Spirit, women were also present in that community (Acts 1:14). Among those who came to the Church listening to the speeches of Apostles, there were women also (Acts 5:14; 8:12).

The gifts of Holy Spirit were given to the believers for the growth of the Church. Prophecy is one such important gift. There were women in the Church who received the gift of prophecy; four daughters of Deacon Philip were among them (Acts 21:9). Probably, prophecies would have been made during the worship services then. This would have been a reason why Paul had commended about women who were prophesying or praying without veil on their heads (1 Cor. 11: 4, 5).

There were women engaged in works for Church full time like Deaconess Phoebe of the Church at Cenchreae (Rom, 16:1). Priscilla and her husband Aquila were co workers with Paul (Rom. 16:3; Acts 18:2). Clova was a woman having a role in the leadership of the Church of Corinth. Paul came to know about the misdeeds being practiced at Corinth through this woman.

Paul has given a list of his co workers in chapter 16 of his epistle to Romans and there are many women in this. In this chapter he also remembers Maria, who was a hard worker and Persis, who toiled hard for our Lord. In Philippians 4:3, a few other women are recalled by him. During those days, the Church fellowship used to get assembled at the house of Lydia, understood to be the first Christian in Europe (Acts 16: 15, 40).

If the information we have scattered across the pages are carefully analyzed, it comes out that women had been playing crucial roles in the New Testament Church. This assumes added importance considering that in the other cultures prevalent there like the Greek and the Jews, women had no freedom; women were not properly recognized and they had no position in the society. What has prompted the New Testament Church to accept women to the community with a sense of equality is on the basis of the theology of Church which is a "New Creation" in God.

Women as viewed by Paul:

"So there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free men, between men and women; you are all one in union with Christ" (Gal. 3:28). This is a statement from Paul that reveals his basic view on the issue. Equality between man and woman lies in the union with Jesus Christ. The Apostle is not advocating any ideology that tasks and actions are not different for man

and woman. The difference between slave and master would disappear in the union with Christ. Likewise, the difference between man and woman too disappears.

Yet, in his pastoral epistles, there are reflections of male domination (1Tim.2:13, 14). He has highlighted certain weaknesses of women in these epistles (1 Tim. 5:13; 2 Tim. 3:6). He explains the need for women to wear a veil on their head while participating in the worship (1 Cor. 11:5). He points out this as a tradition. He would have had in his mind the repercussions when a commonly accepted social custom is ignored.

The ban for women not to talk in Church assemblies was something instituted based on the then circumstances (1 Cor. 14:34). An earlier statement indicates that women used to talk in such gatherings (1 Cor. 11:5). What is stated there is that women can do prophecies and do prayers wearing a veil over their heads. Probably, we have to understand that women were prohibited to lead public worships in the Church of Corinth considering the peculiar characteristics of that Church.

There are many who see Paul as one against women. However, such an allegation can be found baseless once we analyze his theology in its true sense.

Women in Today's Church:

The light from the New Testament Church should influence our approach today on this matter. It shall be noted that during the days of the early Church, basic principles were being employed in line with contemporary practicalities. This shall be a learning point for our Church today.

In our Church, the general views on women as seen in the Hindu and Jewish traditions are very much evident. Because of this, it may appear that they are being given a secondary treatment in the Church. This feeling has to be addressed using the insights we have from the new Testament Church in its right perspective. In all fields of the society, women are seen to work hand in hand with men. The activities in certain segments considered exclusively for men are now effectively handled by women also.

The Sunday School teaching fraternity is dominated by womenfolk these days. It has already been proved that women are good enough to play crucial roles in imparting spiritual training to young generation. They should be properly trained in theology and equipped to handle such tasks effectively. In our Divyabodhanam program, women are taking more interest than men which is a good omen. The capabilities and talents of women should be properly nurtured and utilized in the mission works of the Church. It is a truth that women do much better than men when it comes to taking care of the sick. But women are more or less neglected in the administrative systems of the Church and the parishes. It needs to be thought loud whether we have to persist with the prevailing system or could we refine ourselves.

Exercise:

1. What do you feel about women being ordained as priests?
2. What are the areas in the Church where women can be given more participation?
3. What are the areas in our Church where discriminations are seen? Should this be continued?

Lesson 5

Christian Stewardship

Importance of the subject # The Advantage # Basic Principles # In what all things

Stewardship is a topic that is given lot of importance in the Holy Bible. In Mosaic Law and exhortations of prophets, this has been discussed. People of God were to follow the principle of stewardship in all ways of life. Following his Jewish tradition, Jesus Christ had been stressing on this in all his teachings. Many of his metaphors had been illustrating the principle of stewardship.

However, as of today, this is something lying neglected in the living pattern of believers. When we think of a rejuvenation of our Church, it is necessary that the believers are equipped with an awareness of stewardship. This would help while addressing issues we face related to living ethics or financial matters or such other areas.

The Advantages of learning this Topic:

There are advantages to the Church in general and to individuals specifically; some such aspects are pointed out below.

1. Each believer is owned by God; his goal of life is to live as a servant useful to God.
2. What all tasks are assigned to him by God, he acts faithful to accomplish them.
3. Holy Bible is a book not narrating God's activities and nature alone, but also it reveals how man has to cooperate with God's plans.
4. Being a Christian, he has a responsibility to serve God and help men
5. Worship becomes more meaningful
6. We are able to learn why God, the Father created us; why God, the Son redeemed us; why God, the Holy Spirit leads and sustains us.
7. Being members of the Church of Christ, we learn what the tasks we have before us are and how to accomplish them.

What are the basic Principles?

- a. God has created everything; He owns everything; His is the authority over everything. "Lord, our God! You are great and powerful, glorious, splendid and majestic. Everything in Heaven and earth is yours and you are the king, supreme ruler over all" (1 Chronicles 29:11). The claim 'I am the Lord' is seen frequently repeated throughout Old Testament. But man has been questioning this authority right from the very beginning as recorded from the Book of Genesis onwards. This caused all those problems which followed.
- b. Man was assigned to take care of everything. "Then the Lord God placed man in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and guard it" (Genesis 2:15). The very first command to man from God was to look after the garden for God. This means, man should be a useful servant. Jesus Christ revealed later that man has to sacrifice himself as God's faithful.
- c. Not only that God created all, but man and all living beings and the whole universe is under the care and protection of God. "For him and through Him everything exists" (Hebrews

2:10). "In Him all things hold together" (Col. 1:17). Once, a boy was listening to the story of creation from his father; he learnt that God completed creation within six days. He then raised a question to his father that what has been God doing all these days after that. We must understand here that God is active even today by looking after His creations and He is taking care of them. "My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I too, am working" (John 5:17).

- d. Man is responsible to God as His servant and also as a steward of the universe. When God asks, Adam, where you are, it amounts to God being eager about the whereabouts of man. In Exodus 4:2, God asks, "What are you holding"? We learn here that God is responsible to what man has with him. Again, God asks Elijah, "Elijah, what are you doing here"? Here the responsibilities towards man's actions are revealed. Once, a question was raised to a great person that what was the most enchanting thought he had in mind, his answer was this: personal responsibility to God. Further, Matthew chapter 25 narrates the metaphor of talents and here man's sense of responsibility is clearly illustrated by Jesus. It was also revealed that man should be accountable to God. "And then, all the churches will know that I am the one who knows everyone's thoughts and wishes. I will repay each one of you according to what he has done" (Rev. 2:23).
- e. Thanks and praises to God rises in our hearts. Man would be influenced to praise God with a thanks filled heart for all His graces and care. A wise and faithful steward would be aware of all those goodness showered on him by God. He would be prepared to submit his praises to God, worshipping him with respect. "Each one, as a manager of God's different gifts, must use for the good of others the special gift he has received from God. ----- In all things, praise may be given to God through Jesus Christ to whom belong glory and power from ever and ever" (1 Peter 4: 10, 11). Our goal should be glorification of God in all things and this sense would get strengthened in us.

In what all fields should there be stewardship?

1. Stewardship of Time: All our time has been handed over to us by God as His gift. As His servants, we are responsible to the time we have received. Christ has illustrated what is meant by stewardship of time through two metaphors. One, a master leaves his place after handing over everything to his servants and two, virgins preparing to receive the bridegroom. In both, they are lazy and sleepy without utilizing the time they have with them. The Apostle exhorts, "Don't live like ignorant people, but like people of wisdom. Make good use of every opportunity you have, because these are evil days" (Eph. 5: 15, 16). "As long as it is day, we must keep on doing the work of him who sent him; night is coming when no one can work" (John 9:4). "Be wise in the way you act towards those who are not believers, making use of every opportunity you have" (Col. 4:5). "Work hard and do not be lazy. Serve the Lord with a heart full of devotion" (Rom. 12:11). Each day should be seen as a gift of God to be used faithfully. There must be specific understanding as to the time for work, prayer, meditation, rest, relaxation etc.
2. Physical and Human talents: Each individual is created by God with talents and gifts. It is important that they are different in measures and nature. Paul says, "Well, whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, do it all for God's glory" (1 Cor. 10:31; Col. 3:23). God hands over responsibilities for each individual. Our lives would be meaningful and rewarding only if our tasks are carried out in its proper ways. Our Lord says, "I have shown your glory on earth; I

have finished the work you gave me to do” (John 17:4). We should submit ourselves to God as sacrifices. We should do our tasks as if we are doing them for God. “He bought you for a price. So use your bodies for God’s glory” (1 Cor. 6:19, 20). Our hands and legs, each one of our organs should be in submission to God.

3. Money and other material wealth on the basis of stewardship: God handed over everything in the world to man in faith. Material wealth is not bad in itself. God saw all those created by Him good. But anything is good or bad depends on how we use it. If we use a thing for God and for the glory of God’s name, it becomes holy. In one of the metaphors, our Lord says about a foolish man; he earned substantial wealth by buying landed properties and constructed large go downs which is not seen as a wrong action. But Jesus calls him a fool because he utilized his wealth exclusively for his selfish needs (Luke chapter 12). A rich youth was asked to follow our Lord after disposing off his assets and giving them to the poor (Mark 10:21). This doesn’t mean that all should sell off their properties before following Christ. Material wealth should not be prioritized above God. It should be possible for us handle our wealth faithfully. Our Lord has advised to make friends through unjust Mammon. For earning wealth and dealing with it, Christian values should be held on. God has appointed us as His trustees. We have to make ourselves accountable before Him. How are we utilizing our wealth? What criterion do we employ for that? These things should be in our mind.

Exercise:

1. What are the main points coming up in the metaphor of talents? (Matthew 25: 14 – 30)
2. What do we understand by Christian gifts from 2 Cor. 9: 1 – 5?
3. In what all issues and matters should we show our stewardship?

Lesson 6

Church and Christian Family

Importance of Family # Relation between Husband and Wife # Children Gift of God # Family is the Nursery of Religious Education # Family and Spreading the Good News

The Christian Church considers family a very important segment of the Church. Family is very often described as a miniature of the Church or as a Church at Home. A Christian family is also called a miniature of heaven on earth. All these qualifications reveal the position and glory of family.

The early Church had its origin and growth through families. The Church community in those days used to assemble in families to pray, to learn and to break Bread (Acts 2:46; 5:42; 12:12). During those very early days, Christian houses used to be places for Christian worship (Acts 16:15; Rom. 16:5; Col. 4:15). Though these situations underwent changes in the course of time, the relation between Church and family kept moving on well.

Relation between Husband and Wife:

A family begins when a man and woman join together. This joining together is part of God's plan as we understand from the narration of how mankind was created. "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:27). This means that God created man and woman to live as husband and wife. Jesus reveals this truth by quoting the very same verse (Matthew 19:41).

In the second narration of creation, it is stated that man's rib is taken with which woman is created (Genesis 2: 21 -25). The idea we have here is that woman is created for being a good mate for man and that he would be attracted towards her. Without her, he is solitary and incomplete. Woman is a helping hand for man. In short, when man and woman live as mate and pair, there originates a family. Our Lord says, "The two will become one" (Matthew 19:5) and Paul repeats the very same in Eph. 5: 31. Through these verses, the unity and inseparableness of husband – wife relationship is illustrated with absolute clarity. What is meant here is not about physical union; it hints a total merging of two persons in its wholeness.

The relation between man and woman is of utmost purity (Hebrews 13:4). This relation has been made to compare with the relation between Christ and the Church (Eph. 5: 21 – 23). This is a relation that is inseparable. Our Lord loved the Church. He sacrificed his life for the Church. He purified the Church through Holy Baptism. He elevated the Church to that level beyond any flaws and lacunae. A husband should love his wife in all sincerity in this very same way as if she is his own body. As the Church is having its total commitment to Christ and thus being obedient to Christ, wife should obey her husband and respect him.

The husband – wife relationship should be viewed in relation with Christ. The relation husband has with wife and wife has with husband are on the basis that both are unified to Christ. Husbands should take the love, care and sacrifice of Christ to emulate in their life; wives should idealize the pure piety and love as well as the commitment Church is having to Christ.

When Peter calls wives as fellow – heirs (1 Peter 3:7) their position with husbands is revealed clearly. This indicates that family life is to be seen as a partnership; all relations and feelings should be toned up accordingly.

God expects a proper sexual life because sex and its use have put in place by God Himself. Therefore, unfaithfulness in married life is not only a wrong against justice, but also it is a revolt against God. Both husband and wife are indebted to each other in executing their marital responsibilities. Paul says, "A wife is not the master of her own body, but her husband is; in the same way a husband is not the master of his own body, but his wife is" (1 Cor. 7:4). But Paul acknowledges short separations between them for prayers or fasting.

Children, Gift of God:

When Eve conceived and gave birth to a son, she said, "With the help of Lord, I have brought forth a man" (Genesis 4:1). Children are gift of God. "Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children, a reward from Him" (Psalms 127:3). Children are the fruits of man following God in procreation. The psalmist says, "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well: (Psalm 139:13, 14).

Parents owe it that they have to rear up their children, the gifts of God, with responsibility. The atmosphere within a family should be conducive to physical, mental and spiritual growth of children. It should be filled with love and care. Many relations are spoiled just due to lack of love. The words of Jesus, "Do not belittle this small one" has its relevance in our approach to children. Unlimited freedom too spoils the personality of children. Children should be encouraged to think and act independently; failures should not disappoint them. Encourage them in failures and make them active further by timely congratulations when something is done well. Whatever be the circumstances, there shall not be a case that even a single child is ignored.

Nursery of Church Education:

As far as Church education is concerned, parents are the first teachers. The Church can't impart any sort of religious education or spiritual build up to its young generation effectively unless there is support and encouragement from parents. Thus, the basic inputs of faith have to be passed on to children from family.

The family of Timothy is a classic example for this. "I remember the sincere faith you have, the kind of faith that your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice also had. I am sure that you have it also (2 Tim. 1:5). His mother and grandmother were very keen in imparting faith to their children. Paul reminds Timothy, "But as for you, do continue in the truths that you were taught and firmly believe. You know who your teachers were, and you remember that ever since you were a child, you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3: 14, 15)

The opportunities to learn religious faith are very rare these days and therefore such inputs needed for children ought to be taken care in families. They should have opportunities to read Bible, to pray and to meditate. Presence of God is realized in a family through prayers. Our Lord has given us a promise, "For where two or three come together in my name, I am there with them" (Matthew 18:20).

Spreading Good News:

Church is sent for mission to this world. When Church has a commitment to the world, families have to be part takers in it. Christian families should be models to the world as lives based on faith, love and service.

Families have crucial roles to play in the new world being formulated by Christ. Each family should take part in formulation of that world where there are no injustice, no oppression and no exploitation. The Church is calling upon all families to come out of the narrow horizon of their self to work for the good of our large society. Families should work hard for renewing that big family of mankind that attains its fullness.

Exercise:

1. How can the 'Christianity' be protected in a family?
2. What are the problems disturbing the integrity of family today?
3. Is it true that Paul was against marriages? (Read 1 Corinthians 7).

