

The VINE

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On behalf of the Pastors, staff and Council of Jurong Christian Church, we wish each and every member and worshipper a Blessed Advent Season.

Christmas is a time when we also remember that God gave his Son Jesus Christ the Emmanuel to be born of woman and live as a man to reveal God's love in Word and action.

We can also respond to God's love in our commitment in giving and service to God and to each other. Let's pledge ourselves in tithing of our monies and service for the coming New Year 2001.

I would like us also to carefully think about the basis and motivation of tithing principles as revealed in scriptures.

TITHING

- ❖ The word tithe in the Bible is in Hebrew the word "ma-a-ser" which literally means "tenth part". This is what the people set apart and give as an offering to God. In the ancient world tithe was taken from a broad range of property. Tithing was first mentioned in the Bible in Genesis 14:20 where Abram tithed a tenth of everything he gained as booty from his successful victory in battle over other kings in Canaan. He recognized that God gave him the victory.
- ❖ Leviticus 27:30-33 defined tithe as a tenth of the produce of the land and livestock of the Israelites. "A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD. If a man redeems any of his tithe, he must add a fifth of the value to it. The entire tithe of the herd and flock--every tenth animal that passes under the shepherd's rod--will be holy to the LORD. He must not pick out the good from the bad or make any substitution. If he does make a substitution, both the animal and its substitute become holy and cannot be redeemed."

BASIS OF TITHING

- ✦ Recognition that ultimately God is the creator of all of the earth's wealth as explicated in Psalm 24:1 "The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters. God's people are expected to give back to God a tenth that is a portion of the produce or wealth they possessed, and in some cases they give the first fruits of the land.
- ✦ Recognition that God care for us and is the one that blessed us, Deut 26:10-11 "and now I bring the firstfruits of the soil that you, O LORD, have given me." Place the basket before the LORD your God and bow down before him. And you and the Levites and the aliens among you shall rejoice in all the good things the LORD your God has given to you and your household."
- ✦ Recognition that the tithe belongs to the Lord and is holy to Him, Lev 27:32 "The entire tithe of the herd and flock--every tenth animal that passes under the shepherd's rod--will be holy to the LORD."

PURPOSE OF TITHING

- ✦ To support the "House of God" – Gen 28:20-22 "Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father's house, then the LORD will be my God and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth." The house of God, Jacob symbolized here by the pillar of stone.
- ✦ To support the priests and Levites – In 2 Chronicles 31:4-5 in the reformation under King Hezekiah he directed that the tithes due to priests and Levites to be brought in. "He ordered the people living in Jerusalem to give the portion due the priests and Levites so they could devote themselves to the Law of the LORD. As soon as the order went out, the Israelites generously gave the firstfruits of their grain, new wine, oil and honey and all that the fields produced. They brought a great amount, a tithe of everything." This is also in recognition of the validity of the priests and Levites as God's representatives and acknowledges their right to receive support for the spiritual service they performed on the people's behalf.
- ✦ To imitate God's care for them, by caring for the slaves, the poor, orphans and widows Deut 14:28-29 "At the end of every three years, bring all the tithes of that year's produce and store it in your towns, so that the Levites (who have no allotment or inheritance of their own) and the aliens, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands."

MOTIVATION FOR TITHING

- ✦ Heartfelt love of God and one's brethren. Tithe becomes a channel for expressing love to God and love to neighbor.
- ✦ Malachi 3:8-10 attempt to motivate the people to bring tithe for the right reasons; only then will they receive the Lord's blessings. "Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' "In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse--the whole nation of you--because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it"
- ✦ Amos 4:4 emphasised the lack of blessings because of presenting tithes with the wrong motives "Go to Bethel and sin; go to Gilgal and sin yet more. Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three years."

EFFECTS OF TITHING


- ✦ Tithing demanded that God's people serve their God at a significant cost to themselves.
- ✦ Tithing helped to set God's people apart as His people and His alone, a people holy to Him. Deut 14:2 "for you are a people holy to the LORD your God. Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the LORD has chosen you to be his treasured possession." This blessing was to reinforce our reverence for God and our sense of belonging to Him. Tithing was a family affair too, Deut 14:26 "Use the silver to buy whatever you like: cattle, sheep, wine or other fermented drink, or anything you wish. Then you and your household shall eat there in the presence of the LORD your God and rejoice. "

Wishing you all a Blessed Christmas and a Blessed Year 2001 to come. Amen.



Pastor Martin Wee





Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The scripture is a frequent reminder of our roles in society. In Matthew 5:13-16, our Lord describes us by using two metaphors, "salt" and "light". Jesus makes use of these symbols to illustrate the characteristics of His Kingdom members. Both these symbols refer to the enriching and preservative influence of the Christians in the world and to the influence or witness the Christian shares of Christ.

SALT

There are three meanings to the symbol salt.

1. PURITY

Firstly, it symbolizes **purity**. During Jesus' time, salt was not contaminated. Man did not add anything to it. Salt was plainly obtained from seawater with the help of light from the sun. The Roman soldiers were paid with salt and the word 'salary' was derived from it. Salt was not only pure but also expensive.

Jesus uses the symbol to emphasize to His disciples the call to purity, and underscores the importance of Christians being a wholesome influence on society.

2. A PRESERVATIVE AGENT

Unlike today, there were no refrigerators during that time and salt was used to preserve meat, keeping it fresh. Salt was rubbed thoroughly on the meat before storage. Every member belonging to the Kingdom of God is a preserving element in society. Through Christ we are once again pure (as salt) in God's sight and is as good a preservative agent as salt. We always abide in the teachings of our Lord. As salt of the world, we are to help preserve the values according to what we imbibe from the Word of God.

3. FLAVOUR

If you are cooking a meal and you add too much or too little salt, then the flavour will not be right and you will have a lot of leftovers. However, if you were to add the right amount of salt to your meal it produces the flavour for all to enjoy the meal. As salt adds flavour to an otherwise insipid meal, we as salt can add pleasantness to an otherwise unsavory world by helping people along life's way of hope and comfort in Jesus Christ.

LIGHT

The second symbol is light and there are two meanings to it.

1. THE RADIANCE OF LIGHT

There is nothing secretive about the Christian commitment or the Christian way of life. Described as the light of the world, we are an influence for openness and honesty, for acceptance and love. The influence can be felt. The Christians must not hide themselves, but live and work in places where their influences can shine through.

2. SERVICE

Light serves to illuminate and enable work. It is also useful in providing directions or warning of danger, like the beam of the lighthouse pointing the way for a ship. As Christians, by our teachings and examples, we can be of service as beacons illuminating and giving light to others, edifying them for the glory of God.

Jurong Christian Church is situated within a community with a large number of unbelievers. Let us persist in our prayers that for the year 2001 every one of us, called to be the salt and light of the world, will continue to impact our community and the world we live in for Christ.

This is our mission for the Kingdom of God.

May you have a blessed Christmas and always be a blessing to others.

Pastor Michael Christian

Kids' Camp 2000

When I set foot in the church on 20th November, many familiar faces greeted me. The occasion was the annual JCC K.I.D.S camp. In the midst was also a group of non-Christian friends.

We had two full days of programmes lined up for us. The first day was filled with fun-packed activities like banner making and an excursion to Gardenia Bread Factory. I learnt to be more independent in cleaning up the table after each meal.

Many other life skills awaited my learning on the second day. There were also inspiration, games and lessons from Scripture. The best part of the day was the prize-giving ceremony when I discovered that my team had emerged champion.

I thank God for the dedication of the Sunday School teachers in making it possible for us to spend our holidays wisely during the two days of the K.I.D.S Camp 2000.

Sophia Lau



ChristMas

"On the night before Christmas, all across the world, millions of children will be tucked in their beds while "visions of sugarplums dance in their heads." When they awake they will check their stockings to see if Santa Claus has come." (Quoted from the Internet)

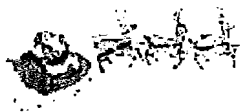
Alas, when the children have checked their stockings, they will be sorely disappointed to note that there is nothing in them and any vision of Santa Claus is but a dream! This is of course if the adults do not go to ridiculous heights to stealthily play the role of the imaginary Father Christmas to perpetuate the dreamland fantasy of innocent little tots.

Surprisingly to me, even in this age of information explosion, there are still people going around propagating the hackneyed hype about Santa Claus on his world tour riding on a reindeer with exciting chimney adventures to boot. Do these fantasy mongers really expect modern-day children to be easily fooled or more foolish adults to buy the idea that (really!) millions of children are putting out their enormously oversized stockings to collect as many as possible the gift droppings as Santa comes sleighing across a snow-cast sky?

In this Christmas season when the world indulges in its traditional merrymaking, we may perhaps enjoy a little mirth at the expense of the incredible yarn-spinners with their bagfuls of fairy-tales to spread the festive cheer with their

own sense of humour. No offence intended, since these yuletide storytellers are out in the spirit of fun and fantasy after all.

Come Christmas eve, if we do not have the good fortune to see a conspicuous presence of colourfully bright stockings deep in the night or at the usual bedtime hours of little children in Singapore, perhaps those on tours of Asian or Western countries can bring back a story or two about what interesting things they get to see in other places. I shall be looking forward to hear about the wonders of Santa Claus in his black suit (red suit blackened by chimney soot) speeding on his reindeer-sleigh going about his gargantuan task of delivering presents to the waiting millions of children around the globe as he counts on his fingers "one ... two ... three ... four ... " to be very sure that there is no unfortunate kid forgotten and left with a shattered dream.



As we await the tales from our travelling friends, maybe we can spend a bit of time at Orchard Road to "gaze into a galaxy of stars while walking in a winter wonderland. That is the promise this Christmas season from the Orchard Road shopping belt." (Straits Times Nov. 20)

I have been there and I would recommend Tanglin Mall for the children to have a fun time wetting their buttocks on a mini-slide made slippery with a regular spewing of soapy foam and showers of "snow". However, if you envision the children having a hands-on understanding of what snow is like, you may be disappointed because the snow showers are more like showers of soapy water without real frost or ice flakes.

Done with the mall and a good supper at the McDonald's or Delifrance outlets conveniently located there, have a stroll further along the road to take in the "magical" sight of a canopy of stars above the traffic. You may ask: "What is so magical about all this?"

Here are a few captivating descriptions from the ST report:

"Adding to the wintry illusion is the 4-m snowman ... And completing the theme is a 7-m archway ... which looks like a giant iceberg."

I do not quite see the whole "wonderland" the way the reporter saw it. It was after all just an artificial light show that stood out with small blinking electric bulbs trying very hard to be like the infinite stars of the universe. What caught my

imagination was the enterprise behind the whole thing with human creativity stretched to its limits to imitate nature. The man-made roof of stars reminded a Straits Times reader (Shawn Lum) about a time when he was literally camping under real stars at Sierra Nevada of Central California. (ST Nov. 26) He gave a vivid description:

"The stars were so bright and so numerous and they appeared to be just beyond the reach of my outstretched fingers. Never before in my life had I seen something as enchanting ..."

The ST reader further reminisced about the time when some people were enraptured by the sight of a huge double rainbow at Bukit Timah Road and another scene of a brilliant full moon hovering against a cloudless sky just shortly after moonrise. He ended his thoughts with these statements:

"No matter how busy or hectic our lives may be, there is always an opportunity to be mesmerised by the exquisiteness of the natural world. It took a light show of sublime beauty for me to realise this, and for that I thank Mr Clair [French designer of the show] and the Singapore Tourism Board."

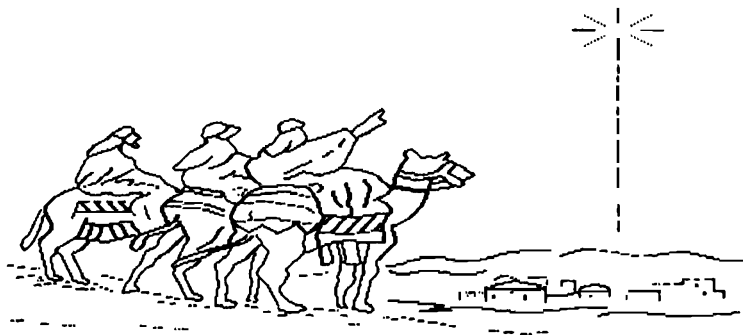
Shawn Lum's view is a thought-provoking one. The difference between what is real and what is artificial is good for us to meditate on. Some people say that there are two Christmases every year - one is secular and commercial while the other is Christian and beyond criticism. There is really only one Christmas but three kinds of celebrations: one is governed by the bottomline interest of having holiday and fun, the second is dictated by a vested commercial interest and the third (most meaningful of all) is with a true understanding of whose birthday we are called to celebrate on Christmas Day.



Obviously, Christmas has to do with Christ. Otherwise, we should not be calling it Christmas. Many people find it important enough to celebrate their birthdays every year. How much more important it is for us to celebrate the birthday of the Christ Child on Christmas Day!

The birth of Christ is described mainly in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Matthew

describes the birth from the viewpoint of Joseph while Luke describes it from the viewpoint of Mary. However, we must recognize that the story of Christ's birth did not begin with the events surrounding Joseph and Mary. In fact, it began far back in time. The birth of Christ was foretold by the prophets whose accounts we read in the OT.



Isaiah 7:14 tells us that "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel." The word "Immanuel" means "God with us". The divine nature of this child, his relationship with God, was already obvious from this prophecy of Isaiah before the child was actually born to Mary. Isaiah 9:6 further emphasizes that "to us a child is born ...", suggesting the humanity of Christ, being born in a natural way as any human being. The prophet went on to say that "to us a son is given". What is given is a gift not for the asking, but given according to the wishes of the giver.

"Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace ..." (Isa. 9:6b ff) From these descriptions of Christ by Isaiah, we know the uniqueness and purposefulness of Christ's birth according to God's plan.

While the birth of the Christ Child was prophesied by Isaiah with meticulous detail, who at the prophet's time would have the courage to believe what he said about the "ridiculous" event of a virgin giving birth to a child who would be called such names as "Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace"? Yet, the event ultimately took place exactly as prophesied. Not only so, it was accurate in every detail. Beyond Christ's supernatural birth, his extraordinary ministry in the world, his amazing death on the Cross and His subsequent resurrection were all as Scripture had predicted

In the 2000 years from Abraham to Alexander the Great to Julius Caesar to King Herod, the Holy Land faced many tribulations. Despite attempts to kill the infant Jesus and the Lord's final crucifixion by the Jewish leaders who felt their

authority being threatened, the birth of Christ, His death on the Cross and His resurrection have formed the cornerstone of our Christian faith.

When we celebrate Christmas, we commemorate the birth of Christ, which we may use as our stepping stone to go forward and backward in time to trace the long story of the Messiah whom God promised to his people. No matter how we dissect Scripture with a conscientious heart, the true import of Christmas will sink into the depths of our minds, hearts, and souls. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (Jn 3:16) As we ponder on these words, we can celebrate Christmas with a joyful heart and a proper understanding of what it is all about.

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John 3:16

Certainly, you would not expect the Christ Child to be part of the shopping belt celebration with a commercial interest more on the wallets of merry-makers than on whether the roof of stars makes any real Christmas sense. The "stars" put up by man are utterly incomparable to the stars put up by God in the natural firmament. Any secular celebration against a backdrop of indulgence with excesses of fun, eating, drinking and spending is in sharp contrast with the message of love, joy, peace and hope in the Christ Child. Some Christians may be indifferent about the dichotomy, but the glaring difference between the two may just have the right potency to shake many of us up to meditate on the real meaning of Christmas. As we walk along Orchard Road to take in the sight of a man-made scene with twinkling light bulbs overhead, let us indulge ourselves with the wonderful opportunity of being reminded of what the real Christmas is about. Just as an artificial light show may strike a chord in our faculties to contemplate and be awed by the exquisiteness of the natural world that is beyond comparison, a "confrontation" with the issues of the seven-storey-tall Christmas tree at Orchard Park, the snowman outside Orchard MRT and the sight of Santa Claus strolling along (instead of climbing down chimneys or sleighing about) may just present us with conversational pieces to share with our kids the truths and distortions about Christmas. May we also be instruments of God's grace sharing with people the real Good News about the Christ Child - God's love gift to the world:

"This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 Jn 4:9-10)

John Lee

A Visit from the Christ Child

by Père Robért

for Maria, Ida, Isabel, Maxine, Crozet & Audrey

'Twas the morning of Christmas, when all through the house

All the family was frantic, including my spouse;
For each one of them had one thing only in mind,
To examine the presents St. Nick left behind.

The boxes and wrapping and ribbons and toys
Were strewn on the floor, and the volume of noise
Increased as our children began a big fight
Over who got the video games, who got the bike.

I looked at my watch and I said, slightly nervous,
"Let's get ready for church, so we won't miss the service."
The children protested, "We don't want to pray.
We've just got our presents, and we want to play!"

It dawned on me then that we had gone astray,
In confusing the purpose of this special day;
Our presents were many and very high-priced
But something was missing – that something was Christ!
I said, "Put the gifts down and let's gather together,
And I'll tell you a tale of the greatest gift ever.

"A savior was promised when Adam first sinned,
And the hopes of the world upon Jesus were pinned.
Abraham begat Isaac, who Jacob begat,
And through David the line went to Joseph, whereat
This carpenter married a maiden with child,
Who yet was a virgin, in no way defiled.

"Saying 'Hail, full of Grace,' an archangel appeared
To Mary the Blessed, among women revered:
The Lord would she would bear – through the Spirit – a son.
Said Mary to Gabriel, 'God's will be done.'

"Now Caesar commanded a tax would be paid,
And all would go home while the census was made;
Thus Joseph and Mary did leave Calilee

For the city of David to pay this new fee.

"Mary's time had arrived, but the inn had no room,
So she laid in a manger the fruit of her womb;
And both Joseph and Mary admired as He napped
The Light of the World in his swaddling clothes wrapped.

"Three wise men from the East had come looking for news
Of the birth of the Savior, the King of the Jews;
They carried great gifts as they followed a star –
Gold, frankincense, myrrh, which they'd brought from afar.

"As the shepherds watched over their flocks on that night,
The glory of God shone upon them quite bright,
And an angel explained the intent of the birth,
Saying, 'Glory to God and His peace to the earth.'

"For this was the Messiah whom prophets foretold,
A good shepherd to bring his sheep back to the fold;
He was God become man, He would die on the cross,
He would rise from the dead to restore Adam's loss.

"Santa Claus, Christmas presents, a brightly lit pine,
Candy canes and spiked eggnog are all very fine;
Let's have fun celebrating, but leave not a doubt
That Christ is what Christmas is really about!"

The children right then put an end to the noise,
They dressed quickly for church, put away all their toys;
For they knew Jesus loved them and said they were glad
That He'd died for their sins, and to save their dear Dad.

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Help us put Christ back in Christmas
by circulating this verse widely.

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FACING THE CHANGING WORLD

by Tan Swee Leong

We have entered into the New Millennium. We are already almost a year into it. What has the New Millennium brought us?

The world before us is a rapidly changing one. In the face of such changes, many of which affect us, what is our response? One major change that impacts us is increasing modernization, sometimes referred to as the westernisation of our society. The increasing influence of the media, the borderless world brought about by the Internet, our growing affluence, more pervasive travel abroad, all brings the influence of the outside world upon us, into our very doorsteps. More importantly, these influences cause changes in our thinking, values and perspectives.

Some of the key changes that we see in the world that we could learn from, be on the guard against and develop scriptural based convictions include:

Growing Economic Prosperity

Our society emphasizes material prosperity, worldly success, efficiency and excellence. People crave and strive to reach these goals - the 5 Cs - all material driven. Those who are unable to reach it try other means, buying a ticket, which promises a rich prize; evidenced by the long queues we witness each week at the 4D booths, and even longer queues when the prize money is increased.

Prosperity and striving for materialistic gains can become obsessive and cause us to become unaware of our wealth compared to the rest of the needy world. Singapore has become affluent, but the drive to increase our wealth can produce a people who are selfish, greedy, and materialistic and not people of contentment, caring and thankful for the rich blessings we enjoy.

"Does life consist of the abundance of possessions?" the Bible asks this pointed question. The answer is obvious to the followers of Christ. In fact the Bible teaches us that "godliness with contentment is great gain". (1 Tim 6:6)

Increasing World Of Competition

In our pursuit of prosperity and success, we strive to outdo others. We increasingly see ourselves as competitors. We seek to develop our abilities and lay claim that we earn our due rewards through our skills and abilities. We tend to be individualistic. We claim that we have the right to choose what we want to do with our lives. We have the right to compete and benefit from our hard work. We seek the highest level of the hierarchy of needs that of self-actualization and self-fulfillment. In all this striving our motivations weaken our responsibility to family, society and to the nation. In wanting our right over others we become more self-centered and less caring.

Christ teaches us to express compassion and to show love even to our enemies. Seek to do good to those

who hate you. Paul instructs us, "each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." (Phil 2:4)

Losing Our Roots

The increase of global communication affects our cultural values, ethics and thinking. People want to discover their own way of doing things based on personal preference. We want to choose our own morality and identity. Personal morality is shaped by the media and our peers. We want a morality that does not interfere with our pursuit of prosperity, success and self-fulfillment.

In a changing world, we need an unchanging standard of right and wrong. Only in Scripture can we find that unchanging standard.

Impact Of Technology

Man has built machines as tools of communication. Modern man has become increasingly dependent on these tools. We try to save time, because the impact of technology has increased the speed in which things has to be done. We have a plethora of communication medium to attend to: e-mail, voicemail, faxes, phone messaging. Our communication mode is increasingly de-humanizing - lacking the human touch. Witness the pervasiveness of SMS (Short Messaging Service on the mobile phone), ICQ, IRC (Internet Relay Chat). Increasingly the youth of today prefer these "impersonal" modes of communication, where messages are

cut and to the point, often in phrases rather than sentences. Letter writing is long gone and rarely used and they are referred to as snail mail. Today's communication demand instant response. The tool of communication designed to serve us has become our master.

Virtual Reality - the world of pure imagination allows us to kill someone, but it is still virtual, only make believe. We have virtual pets; virtual relationships live in a virtual world - when the reality is that we live in a real world. The virtual world does not require commitment, it is all play. Surely there is danger in detaching the real and replacing it with virtual reality.

Through the Internet we have an overload of information. Information is a great pretender of wisdom. The Internet brings us so much information, lots of which are undefined and unconnected. Try doing a search for a simple word like "love" or "computer" or "man". It would probably throw out tens of thousands of hits - all with little interrelatedness.

We have to be careful and discerning when we use technology - only as a tool. Remember the tool of technology is a good servant but a terrible master.

The world is changing, the pace is increasingly hectic, the influences are pressing but oftentimes subtle. Christians today need to build the foundation on the Word that can withstand the vagaries of these changes.



Christmas is special to me. It reminds me of God's special gift to me. This special gift is His precious and only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ who came to this world 2000 years ago to be born as a human being on Christmas day. Without Him, I can never be saved because I am sinful by nature. Only God is Holy. By His grace, He has chosen me to be called His own child. And now I can call Him my Heavenly father, Lord and Saviour. From the day I received Him into my life, He has never failed or left me. But I frequently grieved Him by choosing my own foolish ways that invariably led to disappointments and being misunderstood.

Life is never the same when I have received Jesus as my Lord. I am more conscious of what I say and as I grow and feed on His Word, the Bible, I become more tolerant.

Before I knew Christ, I seldom said "thank you". Whenever I hated any person, no kind words came out from my mouth. I was afraid of darkness, depth and height and was superstitious. I followed my friends to Kulai in JB to consult a medium regarding our future. The medium predicted that I would have difficult childbirth. When I had a severe headache that did not get better after taking the doctor's medication, I drank water mixed with the ash of talisman.

My elder brother often used his knuckles to knock my head and even showed his friends the various ways of knocking. My father ignored my cries and scolded me instead. He said that I was just like a piece

of paper that could not be touched - easily torn. I hated my elder brother so much that when I started working and was staying at the YWCA hostel, I enrolled in a Tae Kwan Do class for self-defence. Ironically, it was then that God brought healing into my life through an elderly European couple, Mr. & Mrs. Harvey Stanley. I stopped pursuing the self-defence course after that.

The Stanleys came knocking at my dormitory's door to invite my roommates and me for fellowship every Tuesday evening. They invited us to their home for tea. There was once when they took us to a coffee shop for drinks and said "Thank You" to the attendant. (In my heart, I was thinking: "It is his job. Why bother with the thanks!"). Their love and concern touched my heart, and I was introduced to Jesus by them. They encouraged me to attend a church. I tried JCC and I loved it. The brothers and sisters-in-Christ were all very caring. They corrected me when I was wrong. I did many wrong things without knowing it. Pastor Kusserow explained to me that I was only inviting the evil spirit into my life by drinking the water of the medium's talisman. He prayed for me and the headache gradually subsided and finally disappeared. I forgave my brother and our relationship improved. Lord Jesus overruled the medium's prediction and blessed me with two normal births.

Lord Jesus is real and alive yesterday, today and forever. His love has erased the fear and hatred in my life.

Dorothy Ovw

Have You Seen the News?

Pokemon 'dangerous'



ISTANBUL - The Turkish health minister on Saturday urged television stations to replace Pokemon cartoons after a seven-year-old girl broke her leg while trying to imitate one of their characters.

Durmus had already asked ministry experts to study the effect of the Pokemon cartoon on children.

Apparently believing she had superhuman powers, Seda Aykanat, launched herself from her fifth-floor balcony on Friday.

She was the second Turkish child to jump from a balcony apparently to imitate Pokemon characters - cartoon animals with special powers. Earlier, a four-year-old boy sustained injuries after a similar jump.

Health Minister Osman

The experts concluded on Friday that the cartoon distanced children from reality, confused them by presenting both "good and bad heroes", and desensitised them to violence, the daily Hürriyet reported on Saturday.

The ministry experts said the popularity of the cartoon and trading cards should be discouraged, but that they should not be banned since this could further attract children to the products.

"Putting the cartoon put off the air all of a sudden could lead to serious problems," Mr Durmus said. "Televisions must over a period of time make (children) forget the cartoon."

The Pokemon phenomenon originated in Japan three years ago as a Nintendo Game Boy game. It quickly expanded into cartoons, comic books and trading cards, becoming a multi-billion dollar enterprise and enjoying enormous popularity.

Spokesmen at Nintendo of America in Redmond, Washington, were not available for comment on Saturday.

- AP



Monday 4 December, 2000 - LIFE Section

Why are we so embarrassed to wear a T-shirt with Christian messages or with the name of Jesus on it? Do we think that we are asking for a fight if we wear such a T-shirt? Let us not be shy to declare that we are Christian.

Biblical Fasting

continued from Nov 2000 issue

Some Biblical Principles on Fasting

Fasting is Assumed by the New Testament: When Jesus spoke about fasting, he didn't say if you fast, but *"when you fast"* (Matthew 6:16). Our Lord assumes that Christians will fast. And from the rest of the books in the New Testament we know that they did.

There once was an inappropriate time for fasting though: when our Lord was here on earth. During that time Jesus' disciples never fasted and that seemed unusual to the religious leaders and John the Baptist's friends. *"Then the followers of John came to Jesus and said, 'Why do we and the Pharisees often fast for a certain time, but your followers don't?' Jesus answered, 'The friends of the bridegroom are not sad while he is with them. But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and then they will fast.'"* (Matthew 9:14-15).

But now Jesus is no longer physically present with us. He will not be until His coming. So until the rapture our Lord knows there will be times when fasting is an appropriate response. He is not here and because of that there will be spiritual struggle, and tribulation, and a need to fast.

The Occasion for a Fast is Voluntary: Fasting was looked upon as a very great virtue in the early church. In fact, they thought so highly of fasting that they inserted the term "fasting" into the Biblical text even though it wasn't in the original

manuscripts (check various translations or margin notes for Matthew 17:21; Mark 9:29; Acts 10:30; 1 Corinthians 7:5)! This emphasis upon fasting also caused them to do the very thing the Pharisees had done, which was to prescribe certain set times for fasting: twice a week on Wednesday and Friday!

We need to be careful to avoid pitfalls of legalism like this. Surprisingly, a particular day for fasting was commanded in Scripture only once -- on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). The fast on the Day of Atonement was connected with a deep mournful spirit in confessing sin. Now in the New Covenant, Jesus Christ has become our atonement offering, so we no longer even need to observe the Leviticus 16 Day of Atonement! In all the rest of the Bible there are no other Scriptures which command fasting at a specific time or on a specific occasion! None!

So when should a Christian fast? When he or she feels the Spirit of God leading them to fast. The occasion for fasting is a totally voluntary decision. Some of the specific times when people in the Bible fasted are listed in the next section. But basically we can say a Christian may decide to fast whenever there is a spiritual concern or struggle in his or her life. Of course, there may be times when those in authority over us proclaim a fast, as was done by Saul in 1 Samuel 14:24 or Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 20:3. But normally and ultimately that decision is solely between us and the Lord.

The Length of a Fast is Voluntary: A fast was usually for one day (as in Judges 20:26; 1 Samuel 14:24; 2 Samuel 1:12; 3:35) from sunrise to sunset, and then after sundown food would be taken. However, some fasts were longer. The fast of Esther continued 3 days, both day and night. At the burial of Saul the fast was seven days (1 Samuel 31:13) and David also fasted seven days when his child was ill (2 Samuel 12:16-18). The longest fasts we find in the Bible are for forty days: Moses (3 times -- Deuteronomy 9:9,18; Exodus 34:28), Elijah (once -- 1 Kings 19:8), and Jesus (once -- Matthew 4:2). The Biblical principle here is that the length of time you fast is determined by your own desires and the occasion or purpose of the fast. There is freedom in the Lord here.

How You Spend Your Time While Fasting is a Personal Decision Too: My ideas about fasting were shaped more by the world and what I saw in the media than by God's Word. So I grew up with the idea that fasting was something done by cloistered monks in prayer, hermits, and very spiritual people on sacred retreats. But that's not the way the Bible thinks about fasting. In the Bible, fasting often occurs as something you do while carrying on your everyday activities!

Matthew 6:16-18 demonstrates this, since Jesus pictures a situation in which Christians are among other people going about their normal duties and activities. In fact, soldiers involved in the activity of warfare sometimes fasted (1 Samuel 14:24) as well as the sailors on ship with Paul (Acts 27:33). There is a certain sense in

which fasting, even in the midst of your daily activities, becomes a constant prayer to the Lord. And in the actual experience of fasting, a periodic pang of hunger can become a good reminder to send up a short arrow prayer for the particular thing about which you are fasting.

What a marvelous freedom God gives us in the area of fasting. Jesus assumes that we will fast, yet he leaves the choice of when to fast, the length of our fast, and the decision of how we will spend our time while fasting completely up to us!

Fasting Does Not Negate Our Responsibility to be Obedient to God: We cannot fast and pray expecting God to bless when there is known sin in our lives. Fasting does not impress God with our spirituality to the point that he ignores our disobedience. On the contrary, genuine fasting will always cause us to examine our hearts to make sure everything is right with Him.

The people of Isaiah's day thought that they could fast in disobedience and God would hear them. But God said, *"on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high".* (Isaiah 58:3b-4).

Occasions for Fasting

"When is it appropriate to fast?" "What types of situations should induce a fast?" "What is a good Biblical reason for going without food?" The Bible has answers to those questions. We find seven occasions when the people of God fasted. God's people fasted in these situations:

Mourning someone's death: We see fasting and mourning connected in 1 Samuel 31:13; 1 Chronicles 10:12; 2 Samuel 1:12; and 2 Samuel 3:35. In these situations fasting showed the sorrow that the people felt over the loss of someone God used in our lives. In fact, the custom of fasting in mourning was considered normal behavior among the Israelites. That's why the servants of David were so astonished when David got up and ate following the death of his son: "*David's servants said to him, 'Why are you doing this? When the baby was still alive, you refused to eat and you cried. Now that the baby is dead, you get up and eat food?!'*" (2 Samuel 12:21).

When someone experiences the loss of a close friend or relative, they usually don't feel like eating. This is a normal, natural reaction in the initial stages of grief. It is a perfectly good reason to fast.

Mourning sin, i.e. in repentance and confession: Examples of this are found in Deuteronomy 9:18; 1 Samuel 7:6; 1 Kings 21:27; Ezra 10:6; Jonah 3:5; and Acts 9:3-9. When people wished to demonstrate that they were serious about repenting from their sin, they fasted. Our willingness to

sacrifice shows the depth of our commitment and in this case fasting is a pictorial way of saying to the Lord, "I care more about getting right with You, God, than I do about even my own life." So a good occasion for fasting is when we are truly grieving over our sins.

A situation of impending danger; for protection: There are occasions when death or danger threaten us. We see from the Scripture that it is certainly appropriate to employ fasting as a means of receiving God's protection during these times. When Ezra was carrying a large consignment of gold and silver to the temple in Jerusalem along a route infested with bandits, he records: "*I proclaimed a fast...that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a straight way for ourselves, our children, and all our goods*" (Ezra 8:21,23,31). Other examples of fasting for protection are found in Jeremiah 36:9 and Esther 4:3.

Direction: Fasting helps us find God's will. If we expect God to reveal his direction for our lives, we must put Him first. Often this means putting aside the fulfillment of our physical appetites so that we can focus our attention on Him.

We find an example of fasting for direction in 2 Chronicles 20:1-30. Three nations were coming against Judah to destroy them. King Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, proclaimed a fast for the whole nation and they asked the Lord what they should do. God heard their prayer and their fast and gave the people prophetic direction through one of the choir members! God told them

what to do.

Acts 13:2 is another example of direction being given by God during a fast. Here we find the leaders of the church of Antioch worshipping and fasting. The Holy Spirit used this occasion to tell the church leaders to choose Paul and Barnabas from among their group and send them out to spread the gospel among the Gentiles. So fasting is one of the ways we seek God's guidance and direction in our lives.

Sickness: There are two examples in Scripture of fasting on behalf of those who are sick: 2 Samuel 12:15-23; Psalm 35:13. Both of these examples come from the life of David. In Psalm 35:13 David says, *"Yet when they were sick, I put on clothes of sadness and showed my sorrow by going without food."* David saw fasting as a way to ask God for physical healing in the lives of other people.

The ordination of missionaries or church leaders: Fasting appears to have been a regular part of the ordination of church leaders and missionaries. We have already looked at Acts 13, the calling of Paul and Barnabas for missionary service. Verse 3 tells us that after they received this direction from the Lord, then they ordained them for missionary service by prayer, fasting and laying their hands upon them.

We find the same thing later on in the book of Acts -- Paul and Barnabas fasted at the selection of the first elders for the new churches they planted (Acts 14:23). It would appear that fasting in these cases is a way of seriously seeking God's blessing,

anointing, and power upon the leaders of the church.

Special revelation: The final occasion for fasting is for special revelations. Exceptional insights from God were sometimes given to the prophets and others during periods of fasting. Daniel sought God with fasting to ask God to fulfil His promise to restore Jerusalem (see Daniel 9:9,18 and compare with Jeremiah 29:10-13). He received through the angel Gabriel a wonderful unfolding of God's plan for Israel. If we have sought God in vain for the fulfillment of some promise, it could be that He is waiting for us to humble ourselves by fasting and seek Him as Daniel did.

Other examples of prophetic revelation during times of fasting are found in Exodus 34:28; Deuteronomy 9:9,18; and Daniel 10:1-3. God decided to speak to these men while they were in the midst of a fast. For those seeking prophetic guidance or revelation today, God may also use the occasion of fasting to speak to them in a very unique way.

What Will Be Your Response?

As we look at the Bible it becomes evident that fasting was practiced more often than Christians usually practice it today. In fact, among most American Christians fasting is entirely neglected. I want to challenge you today to begin to practice the discipline of fasting. If you accept the challenge of God's Word to fast, I would like to provide some guidelines for you as you begin to make this a more regular part of your

Christian life. The Lord will reward your efforts at fasting. Here are some individual guidelines for fasting:

1. Reach a personal conviction on the subject through careful Bible study. -- Get into the Word on your own. See what the Bible really says about fasting. Check the things that have been said here, read the Scripture references listed below, and go deeper.
2. A physician's note: Make sure you are medically able to fast before attempting it.
3. Begin with short fasts and gradually move to larger periods of time if you desire. If you've never fasted before, you need to start slow. Don't start with a three day fast!
4. Be prepared for some dizziness, headache, or nausea in the early going. Most of our bodies have never gone without food for longer than a few hours.
5. Break a prolonged fast gradually with meals that are light and easy to digest. Trying to gorge yourself following a fast will only make you sick and will leave you with an unpleasant memory of fasting.
6. Enter with a positive faith that God will reward those who fast

with the right motives. -- God says that He will: *"When you fast, your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you"* (Matthew 6:18).

7. Mix your fast with prayer, time in Scripture reading, singing, or devotional reading. Remember: fasting is not an end in itself. Seek the Lord, not the experience of fasting.
8. Keep checking your motives concerning your fasts. Hypocrisy and spiritual pride can easily creep in. There is a reward for fasting, but only fasting done with the right motives (Matthew 23:28).

SOME BIBLICAL REFERENCES TO FASTING TO GET YOU STARTED





5 THE LITURGICAL SERVICE

Liturgical service is a bore? What is the actual problem? - The problem may lie in ourselves.

A favorite whipping boy of many churchgoers in Singapore us has for a long time been the use of rote repetition in prayer and the liturgy. The common complaint: "Those poor Lutherans, all they ever do is say the same old confessions and prayers and creeds all the time. Just "Lord, have mercy," or some such prayer, over and over and over again. But they don't think about what they are praying, they just rattle those words thoughtlessly off the tongue."

We would not hesitate to admit that some rote repetition is probably used by some people somewhere, who never give thought to what they are saying, but it is far more important to note that rote repetition is in the lives of many - an extremely valuable tool of learning and of meditation. So while for some, rote repetition is an entirely fruitless waste of time, for others, it is a necessary aid to Christian meditation.

But how might we reply to the scoffer and his worry about repetition as mindless chatter? Let us deal first with the greater reason to consider a salutary use of rote ritual: it is because Christ has Himself so directed His Church. The scoffers' scorn must be directed at Christ Himself before it is directed at the liturgy of the Church. The most common rote ritual prayer in use in the Church today, and, for that matter, in all her history, is the **Our Father**. Who could gainsay the fact that of all the prayers repeated over and over and over again, this one must rank on top of the list? Indeed, the scoffer could find a great target for his scoffing by considering the way Christians just keep on repeating and repeating these same words all the time. But against what is he really scoffing? Or, more to the point, against whom? This is, after all, the Lord's Prayer, the prayer the Lord Jesus gave us.

But the scoffer might well (as some have done) direct our attention to the words of Jesus in St. Matthew's gospel which serve as a preface to His giving of this prayer in 6:7-13. First He said, "When you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do," which would seem to support the scoff, until one considers the words following: "For they think that they will be heard for their many words." Thus "vain" has to do not with

"repetition," but with the thought that by repetition one can gain a hearing. The abuse of the rosary does come to mind here, but not without the thought that it could as easily have a salutary use, depending on one's state of mind. But more to the point, I have heard many a scoffer chide rote prayers while at the same time preferring himself to run on endlessly with the words of his vain musing, with the rather transparent assumption that his sincerity will surely be better demonstrated to God if he can sustain the monologue for an extended period of time. To whom, then, does Jesus' warning best apply?

The scoffers also like to refer to Jesus' words immediately preceding the Our Father: "Pray like this," He says, "Our Father," etc. (Matthew 6:9). The key word, they say, is the word like. This word has even led Blessed Martin Luther to see the Our Father as a pattern for all Christian prayer, and to compose prayers quite intentionally according to the pattern found there. Therefore, the scoffer can maintain that the Lord's Prayer was not really meant to be repeated by rote, as it is, over and over, but rather, to be a pattern and nothing more.

We could refer by way of reply to the overwhelmingly unbroken and monolithic practice of the Church catholic over her centuries of existence to incorporate the Our Father in virtually every order of service and prayer office one can find, but this might (at least to a scoffer) beg the question: so what? Laying aside the rather patent arrogance such talk belies (against all the churches of all time one really wishes to pray?), we could also reply by way of the Our Father as it is found in St. Luke 11:2. The Lucan version of Jesus' preface is more direct than the Matthean: "When you pray, say, Our Father," etc. Here we find a simple and refreshing command: say this, which ought to lay to rest the prattle of scoffers against rote ritual. For according to these unmistakable terms it is Jesus Himself who here is the One ultimately responsible for the Church's rote ritual. Thus the Church's unbroken record of prominent usage of the Our Father is first of all a mark of her obedience to her Master. Conversely, any scoffing against rote just because it is rote is first of all a mark of disobedience to the Same.

There is latent truth in the charge that rote ritual will yield wandering minds. That is not a charge against it, but on the contrary another point in its favor. Following is the reason this is so.

What marks the difference is frame of mind. The mind set one brings to prayer or worship is of critical importance for worship. If someone approaches prayer begrudgingly, prayer will not do him much good at all. This is especially true of prayers repeated by rote. Here will be found, rather, an opportunity to scoff, or at least

to let the mind wander to other matters. It is no doubt due to the awareness of such wandering of minds that contemporary worship-planners choose to construct the prayers of the Church in such a way as to snatch the attention of these minds, to bring them back to the task at hand. Creativity then becomes a great asset, for the more one can invent new ways to catch attention, the more success one ought to expect. Underlying this approach is a view that wandering minds are primarily the responsibility of the liturgist, the pastor.

This implication fails to note the true nature of the problem of the perennial wandering mind. **Wandering minds—particularly minds that often fall victim to wandering—are the fruit of a failure to acknowledge the benefit of ritual prayer. Those who approach the ritual with even an implicit scorn for such things—thinking, for instance, this rote stuff won't really do me any good—will not be inclined toward paying attention.** We already said this; why say it again?, etc. When worship planners fail to take such implicit scorn into account, they miss the true nature of the problem at hand.

Could it be that such scorn is actually an aversion to the very idea that one must direct his attention to words other than his own? One who puffs, Why say this again? is in essence complaining that his mind wants something new to receive, something else. Is this the creative part of the mind, then? For to create something is to experience something new, something completely else. Without disparaging creativity altogether—for there is surely a season for everything—it can hardly be denied that creating one's own words or thoughts is necessarily opposed to receiving someone else's words or thoughts. Therefore when the matter at hand is the Word of God and the importance and command of Christ to meditate thereon (Search the Scriptures, John 5:39), creativity is quite out of place. We might even suggest that it was this mischievous desire for creativity that led to consumption of the forbidden fruit in Eden (as if to say, "We want something new!"). At least it can be deduced that scorn of repetition, when seen here, has no real object other than the Word of God. It is, in short, disobedience to the Sabbath commandment, with its attendant implication that we gladly hear and learn the Word of God.

Now we can get at the reason the employment of rote ritual in worship is a point in its favor, even in connection with the wandering of minds. In addition to the dominical command, **rote repetition is a great divider: it helps to separate the sheep from the goats.** The fact that rote ritual is the bane of some and the blessing of others is not unrelated to the fact that rote ritual results in the wandering of minds. For in the first place, when the mind of the contemptuous wanders, it will produce the closing of his mind; conversely, when the mind of the diligent wanders, this will produce a self-

chiding, and hence a greater desire to concentrate. In fact, such a one who puts forth the consequent effort to concentrate will quickly find that he has no difficulty doing so, by virtue of the fact that much rote repetition is going on, and he already knows what to expect.

This whole process is not unlike the reason Jesus gave for preaching in parables:

Because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand . . . For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. (Matthew 13:14-15)

Why did Jesus preach in parables, if He knew that some people were already dull of hearing? His approach contains both grace and judgment: grace for those who do hear, and implicit judgment against others who refuse, as if He would say, This message is not for you, then. So His parables served as a beginning of the separation of the faithful from the hypocrites. For it was only those who asked, What does this mean? Who were told?

So also does **rote repetition** serve to **separate the faithful from the hypocrites**, and in a way to expose the hypocrisy of the latter: I'll say it once, but don't make me listen two or three times in a row! Oh? And why not? Because you did not really rejoice in it the first time?

We find therefore another critical reason for keeping the liturgy, latent in the very complaints of those who wish to throw it out. Liturgical worship—which in fact is called liturgical precisely because it employs set (rote!) forms and orders, using in repetitive patterns portions of the Word of God, keeping patterns handed down through the tradition of the Church—tends automatically to weed out the scoffers. Of course, God wants everyone, including scoffers, to be saved, but He also knows—as should we—that no scoffer who persists in his scoffing at the Word of God can be saved. Jesus' approach to such as these was to let them alone (Matthew 15:14), and on the other hand to say, "Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it" (Luke 11:28). So it is reasonable to suppose that the liturgy has been employed throughout the history of the people of God in part for this very reason: it is helpful to the faithful and it hinders the hypocrites

