

church

THE CHURCH IN SINGAPORE

times

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Perfected in the Love of God

In the arrangement of the books of the Bible, God has in His sovereignty placed the apostle John's ministry at the rear. His gospel comes after that of Matthew, Mark and Luke; his epistles are placed after the other epistles; and he also wrote the last book, Revelation. This, I believe, is because John's ministry is particularly targeted at the needs of the church in the end times.

The central theme of John's ministry is to lead us to know the living God and that God is life. This life is that which he himself has heard, seen and handled (1 John 1:1). It is not a doctrine but a living Person, even the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. John also tells us that we are born of God, and God's life dwells in us through His Son (1 John 5:12).

Two expressions of life

John also shows us two evidences of God's life: one is light and the other is love. From John 1:4, "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men", we see that the first expression of God's life is light. He who knows God will know that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. John also testifies, "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practise the truth" (1 John 1:6). He who lives in this light is righteous and truthful: his 'Yes' is 'Yes', and his 'No', 'No' (Matt 5:37).

The other expression of life is love. He who has life and walks in the light has a kind of living that loves the brothers. 1 John 2:9-10 says, "He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light". Hence, the proof of having life and living in the light is loving the brothers.

"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God" (1 John 4:7). Love comes from God; He is the source of love. God has manifested His love to us by sending His Son into this world to be our propitiation, and he who has received the Lord Jesus Christ has experienced God's love. Now as God's children, we love one another. This is the evidence of God's life in us.

Be perfected in love

Love is a wonderful and important element. "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not

(Continued on next column)

rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails" (1 Cor 13:4-8).

God's love is perfect in itself, but within men, it is restricted by the weaknesses of the fallen flesh and not perfected. God desires that this love is not only received into us, but also perfected in us. The church is where God's love can be perfected in us. In the church life, it is inevitable to encounter differences and offences, but we need to ask the Lord to perfect His love in us and help us to be longsuffering toward one another.

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The Lord is coming back soon. Although we cannot know the day and hour, we can tell when it is near. The increasingly frequent incidence of social and economic chaos resulting from both natural disasters and human doings, and the elusive peace talks bring to our mind the momentous question: How do we prepare for the Lord's return?

To this end, we hope the Church Times can be of help to the saints. The Church Times has been in circulation for nine years, and our aims remain that it should edify the saints, stir up our love for the Lord and His church, and make known the wondrous works of God in the church. The time is short. Let us awake and walk wisely, redeeming the time and be perfected in God's love.

The editors

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No fear in love

John says, "Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgement; because as He is, so are we in this world" (1 John 4:17). The judgement day is near, how shall we prepare ourselves? John shows us a simple way – allow God's love to be perfected in us, for there is no fear in love.

In the church life, it is not fitting to be suspicious of one another or fearful of having fellowship with one another. He who fears has not been perfected in love. On the other hand, there should be freedom in love to care for and love one another, to be bold to speak the truth in love, and be unafraid of being neglected or condemned. This is the evidence that we have been perfected and built up in love.

We must experience this love and let it constrain us to live as the Lord did. The Lord is righteous, holy, longsuffering, compassionate and tenderhearted. When we allow His love to be perfected in us, we will be like Him.

Keep His word

He who loves God keeps His word. The summary of God's word is love. "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments" (1 John 5:3). To practise love is to keep His word. When God says love the brothers, He refers to an intimate relationship. "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him" (1 John 5:1). This is not an exhortation but a commandment. Here, it does not say, "should love" but "also loves" him who is begotten of Him. Love is natural; no one in a family is taught to love one another, but the brothers just love one another. This, however, does not eliminate the possibility of problems among the members.

If we keep God's word in this way, His love will be perfected in us. If we speak much but do not love, we are like the Pharisees who honoured God with their lips but whose hearts were far away from Him, who had many teachings but no actions. We ought to take God's word seriously, otherwise His word will condemn us one day.

Let this love grow

"As His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 1:3-8). The word "add" in these verses means to grow or increase. If we heed this exhortation, we will never stumble and will have an abundant entrance into God's kingdom.

Pursue love

To pursue love is to learn to live in the fellowship of the heavenly Father and His Son (1 John 1:3), to walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:25), to come under the Lord's teaching (Rev 3:19), and to keep ourselves in the love of God (Jude 21). It also requires us to learn to deny ourselves, that is to forsake our soul life. This is the greatest expression of love.

Do not love the world, for John warns us, "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15). To be perfected in love, we must deal with the world and not allow it to occupy our hearts; otherwise, our hearts would not have room for God's love.

Encourage one another

Dear saints, we are the Father's beloved and are truly brothers and sisters. We may hold different views and may have encountered unpleasant situations, but we should forget them quickly. This is the law of life that John has spoken of. The Lord is coming to receive His bride, and love is the most precious relationship between Christ and His bride, which is the church. When we love Him, His love is perfected in us, and we can be like Him. We are God's children and we have received the Holy Spirit into us. The Spirit has also shed abroad God's love in our hearts. Therefore, nothing is impossible. No commandment is burdensome when we do it out of love for God. May the Lord inscribe His word into our hearts so that this living word may operate in our whole being. In this way, the church life will become better. Amen.

(Based on messages of the Church Conference in December 2000; has not been reviewed by the speaker.)

Truth Column

The Holy

Work of the Holy Spirit

1	Leads the believers by the truth, and does not tested.
2	Convicts the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8).
3	Leads men to true repentance (Luke 3:10-14).
4	Obeys God and humbles Himself, just like the Lord whose food was to do God's will and who did not let robbery to be equal with God (John 4:34; Phil 2:5-8).
5	Does not tolerate sin, leads men to walk in the light and not to "do evil that good may come" (Rom 7:5).
6	Leads men to choose the way of the cross and for the world willingly, just like the Lord Jesus who laid down His life for our sins willingly.
7	Almighty. The Holy Spirit works as He wills, just like the Lord Jesus performed miracles, there are no fixed methods.
8	Encourages men to testify for the Lord boldly.
9	Teaches men to understand God's word.
10	Glorifies God and Christ, not men.

Olives That Have Known No Pressure

– by Watchman Nee (1903-1972)

- 1 Olives that have known no pressure / No oil can bestow;
If the grapes escape the winepress, / Cheering wine can never flow;
Spikenard only through the crushing, / Fragrance can diffuse.
Shall I then, Lord, shrink from suff'ring / Which Thy love for me would choose?

Each blow I suffer / Is true gain to me.
In the place of what Thou takest / Thou dost give Thyself to me.
- 2 Do my heart-strings need Thy stretching, / Songs divine to prove?
Do I need for sweetest music / Cruel treatment of Thy love?
Lord, I fear no deprivation / If it draws to Thee;
I would yield in full surrender / All Thy heart of love to see.
- 3 I'm ashamed, my Lord, for seeking / Self to guard away;
Though Thy love has done its stripping, / Yet I've been compelled this way.
Lord, according to Thy pleasure / Fully work on me;
Heeding not my human feelings, / Only do what pleases Thee.
- 4 If Thy mind and mine should differ, / Still pursue Thy way;
If Thy pleasure means my sorrow, / Still my heart shall answer, "Yea!"
'Tis my deep desire to please Thee, / Though I suffer loss;
E'en though Thy delight and glory / Mean that I endure the cross.
- 5 Oh, I'll praise Thee, e'en if weeping / Mingle with my song.
Thine increasing sweetness calls forth / Grateful praises all day long.
Thou hast made Thyself more precious / Than all else to me;
Thou increase and I decrease, Lord – / This is now my only plea.

This hymn is one of Watchman Nee's most well-known hymns. Penned in his prime, the hymn bears the hallmark of his life and ministry – denying the Self and bearing the cross unto God's glory.

During the early days of his ministry, Nee often encountered disagreements with another co-worker. Despite how hard Nee tried to convince the brother, the latter simply ignored for he was older than Nee. Adamant that he was right, Nee told this to his mentor, sister M E Barber. Instead of taking sides, Barber told Nee, "It is better for you to listen to him, for in the Lord, the younger should submit to the older." When Nee persisted that the older ones could be wrong, she maintained her reply.

Once, Nee saw this older co-worker refusing to submit to another more elderly co-worker, and he was furious. He went to sister Barber about this. She replied firmly, "You still have neither seen the life of Christ nor known the cross! You keep insisting that you are right and your brother is wrong. You are merely concerned about what is right or wrong, but I'm concerned about the life of the cross ..." Her reply cut deeply into Nee's heart. Suddenly, his entire natural life was exposed in God's light, and he saw how he had been living by himself and was thus utterly unfit to serve God. He repented and for the following 1½ years, Nee learnt to restrain himself according to the Holy Spirit and endured in tears and suffering. This made him realise how hard it was to deal with his Self, and how needful to have a gentle, meek and peaceable spirit in serving God.

Nee later testified, "Praise God for bringing me before Him frequently through such difficulties so that I could enjoy divine fellowship with Him. I had been top in school, how could I take second place when serving God? I told God daily that I couldn't stand being number two for the authority and glory I get is too little! However, I thank and worship God from deep within for all that has happened. This is the best training for me to learn to submit. I take second place gladly because when I yield readily, the joy I have is far greater than that which I experienced when I was first saved. Since my Lord obeyed God even unto death, I am also willing to submit to Him. I am willing to choose the cross, receive its dealing and give up all my own opinions."

In 1952, Nee was imprisoned for his faith. His heart answered "Yea!" readily for he had been trained to bear the cross for God's will and glory. After 20 years of imprisonment, he was martyred in 1972.

(Reference: *The Hymnists and Their Hymns* by Newman Sze, 1987, and *Watchman Nee's Testimonies* by K H Weigh, 1974)

Spirit vs the Evil Spirits

Work of the Evil Spirits

fear being	Deceive men by signs and wonders (Matt 24:24), and are not willing to be tested.
blinding	Blind men so that they cannot see their transgressions and are without feelings in their conscience.
tempting	Lead men to hypocrisy (Matt 3:7-8).
to lead Jesus to consider Himself God (John 8:12, 3:8).	Self-centred, disobedient to God (Eph 2:2), resist God and call themselves God.
to bring about the death of His Son	Spirit of uncleanness and of darkness (Eph 6:12), making men commit shameful and malicious acts (Eph 5:12; Matt 22:15-22).
to make the world His	Use every means to entice, deceive, threaten and tempt men, before enslaving and controlling them.
to make men like Him	Their power is limited. Although they can perform wonders, they are not omnipotent (Exo 8-11).
to make men were	Make men feel unashamed in doing strange things, bringing shame to the Lord's name.
	Do not want men to understand the truth; make them dependent on external forces instead.
	Usurp God's position and glorify men.

Jesus Saves Me from Self-Centredness

– by Bro Carleton R Grose

I had always thought highly of myself. Nothing was too difficult for me. I had been very obedient; I obeyed my parents, spoke the truth, and held high moral standards. I also had a good built, was exceptionally intelligent and excelled in whatever I did. In junior high, I was top in every competition and these victories further ballooned my extra large Self.

After junior high, I got entrance into a prestigious university in the north-west part of the country. Initially I was a little nervous about how I would fare among so many talented students, and I tried to suppress my own high-mindedness. However, I soon discovered that even at this place, nothing could beat me. I became even more self-confident than before.

Friends are few

During a training session onboard a ship, a sailor spoke to me about Christ. Despite my Catholic upbringing, I had never heard of the things he said concerning Christ. Though he spoke well, I did not believe.

While back in school, many friends became annoyed at my high-mindedness and began to distant themselves from me. Some Christians, however, feeling that I needed Jesus, often tried talking to me; I was annoyed and avoided them. As a result, I was mostly alone.

Being alone was all right for I was kept busy throughout the week with school and recreation. During weekends, however, I found it hard to kill all the time I had, even having spent many hours on the TV and radio, reading and writing. At such moments, many questions begin to surface from deep within my heart: Who am I? Why am I here? What am I doing? How shall my life be?

In search of life's meaning

One night, my buddies were out and I suddenly felt very disturbed by those unanswered questions. I thought to myself: Let's forget it and end this life altogether. In agitation, I wrote a suicide note, pinned it on the door of my dorm and left. I walked towards a nearby lake with the intention of drowning or freezing myself to death. On the way there, my senses and emotions were drawn into an intense war: "What is the use of this?! What are you trying to prove?!" My senses prevailed and I awoke. Returning to the hostel, I felt disappointed that no one had noticed my note.

Since that incident, I decided not to depend on others for help in my search for life's meaning. I started reading more widely, from classics and puritans to science fiction and supernatural writings. Finally, I read the Bible. Inside, something amazing caught my eyes, that is the record in Acts of how the believers lived together in oneness; I marveled at the indescribable love they shared. I decided to search for such love. I went to various Christian denominations but I was disappointed.

Freedom in Christ

Until one day, a friend brought me to the church (in Chicago). When I stepped into the meeting, I was received as one of them. They did not care

a bit of how handsome or intelligent or annoying I was. Their love for one another was so real and this deeply attracted me. I realised too that such love was the issue of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. That day, in tears I accepted the Lord Jesus into my life.

Since then, I felt like a different person. I could not live the way I did. I saw how vile I was – I had never thought of myself this way. I also felt disturbed when I acted self-righteously. I realised that it was the Lord's working within me, and I could not but proclaim that He is the Lord. I consecrated my life to Him and from that moment, all my uneasiness and troubles vanished, and I experienced freshness and fullness instead. I knew then what it was to receive the Lord's salvation and be freed from the chains of self-centredness.

(Reproduced from Gospel Testimonies Book 2, published by Taiwan Gospel Book Room, 1980)



Announcements
& Prayer Items

Adults' Meeting

The Adults' Meeting is presently pursuing the five books of Moses (also known as The Pentateuch). These books are important as they serve as the key to understanding the entire Bible. To-date, we have covered Genesis, Exodus and Leviticus. Beginning from April, we will be studying the book of Numbers. We invite all the saints to join us in our journey through Numbers. The meeting is held every Saturday 7.30pm at Hall 1.

Youth & Young People's Meeting

The Students' Meeting held every Saturday at 4pm has been renamed the Youth & Young People's Meeting. Please pray for the youths and young people in the church, that they may be gained by the Lord for His purpose and His kingdom.

Youth & Young People's Camp

Date : 10-13 June 2001
Venue : Hall 1

Children's Camp

Date : 8-9 June 2001
Venue : Changi Conference Centre
7 Upper Changi Road North
Singapore 507705