

January - March 2013

ARMOR OF GOD

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH

Jesus in the Gospel of John

- Jesus in the Gospel of John
- A Crown of Beauty
- The Shema & the Rich Young Man
- Pure & Faultless Religion

“END OF THE WORLD”

Not too long ago, an earthshaking event was predicted by the head of a church. The prediction supposed that the catastrophic occurrences which will finally lead to the second coming of Christ will happen on May 21, 2011. We don't know if this definitive 'end of the world' announcement was made to awaken a 'lethargic' church; but then heavy preparations were made by the membership to the point of divesting and liquidating assets in anticipation for the great "take off". Two exact dates were set - probably as a failsafe measure of the event. Yet, both failed. Since then, nobody heard of another prediction; but silence doesn't always mean the end of it. To most, these unfulfilled ominous predictions are no longer alarming. Most are already apathetic, if not calloused, or even sarcastic about it.

As of this writing, the Mayan calendar failed in its prediction that doomsday will happen last December 21, 2012. Prior to that date, (except perhaps for the 'dyeed in the wool' believers) people seem to have taken the prediction nonchalantly, if not derisively. As expected nothing unusually turbulent came to pass.

Generations come and go; the world continues to turn around its axis in the same speed and rate of recurrence. And, except for the scientific development and technological advancement that provided ease and comfort (or even threat and danger) to its inhabitants, everything appears normal. Wars, floods, typhoons, tsunamis, earthquakes, epidemics and scourges of all kinds visit humanity in regularity, but mankind keep "picking up the pieces" and continue to strive towards recovery and development.

Will the scoffers prove themselves right when they scornfully made the following statements recorded by the Apostle Peter? "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts; and saying: Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." (2 Peter 3:3-4)

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Jesus in the Gospel of John

By Rene D. Corpuz

If you were given the opportunity to tell a friend the most important knowledge about the Lord Jesus, what would you tell him? The apostle John was commissioned to deliver the message, and he revealed the truth boldly and without hesitation. In the opening chapter of his testimony, the apostle John disclosed what he feels is the most important information concerning the Lord. If we're the type that reads only the very first few pages of any given book on a shelf, John would have succeeded in giving us what we ought to know about Jesus in the introductory pages of his "testimony"—or more popularly known among Christians as the Gospel according to John.

Jesus, the Word

The opening statement of the Gospel according to John reads: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:1-3, KJV).

These very first three verses alone reveal a deep and profound knowledge about the Lord Jesus and shatter a long list of traditional Christian beliefs. Immediately we are presented with three undeniable truths:

- The Word has always existed alongside God; second,

- The Word Himself is also a God being, and finally,
- The Word is the very Creator of all things that exist.

The same was in the beginning with God.

From the onset, the apostle John announced that Jesus, being the Word, is not an ordinary human being. John presented in his gospel that the "Word" existed at the very beginning, He was there with God. John tells us that there were two God Beings at the beginning; one known as the "Word" and the other addressed simply as God. John clearly established that the "Word" was also a God Being! Jesus' pre-existence was written by the other gospel writers, and spoken by John the Baptist as well.

In Matthew 2:4-6, it is written:

And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. (KJV)

This prophecy is a shortened version of the original prophecy given in Micah 5:2, which gives us a very insightful perspective into the true

origin of the Lord Jesus:

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting.”

Of Jesus, John the Baptist declared: This is He of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, **for He was before me.**’ (John 1:30.)

John feels it is important to emphasize to his listeners and readers to believe in the pre-existence of the Lord Jesus. Which means it is equally important for us to believe in the pre-existence of Jesus as the Word, as God.

John’s reference to the Lord Jesus as being the Word is not unique to the gospel. It is one of the titles of the Lord mentioned in a vision seen by John while exiled in the Isle of Patmos (Revelation 19:11-16).

All things were made by Him. All things were created by the “Word”, He made everything that existed. John then declares that the Word became flesh, the One we would eventually come to know as Jesus, the Christ (John 1:14).

The apostle Paul also teaches that Jesus Christ is the Creator of all things, visible and invisible, implying that even the angels were His creation:

For by Him all things were created that are in heaven

and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through

The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews echoes the very same message:

And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands. (Hebrews 1:10).

Jesus, the Son of God

Besides being the Creator, the apostle John also presented Jesus as the Son of God. (John 1:18, 34, 49). By this it explicitly implies that the other God whom Jesus shared company with at the beginning was His Father. In John’s gospel, and the other gospels, Jesus would address God as “Father” on numerous occasions. This same truth, that Jesus is a Son, is embodied in John 3:16:

“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

The Jews of Jesus’ day crucified Him because they refused this testimony, this truth. It is to our spiritual well-being to accept the testimony of the apostle John as proclaimed in the gospel account that Jesus is the Creator—the Son of God. To believe that Jesus is the Son of God is crucial to receiving the gift of eternal life—to live forever (John 6:40, 47).

Luke, author of the gospel

according to Luke, made it clear to Theophilus that Jesus is God’s Son:

He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And the angel answered and said to her, “*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.*” (Luke 1:32, 35 NKJV)

John the Baptist himself confirms and declares to those Jews, the common folks and their leaders who were listening to him at the Jordan River the true identity of Jesus:

I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.” (John 1:33-34, NKJV)

More importantly, even God the Father Himself declares that Jesus is His Son:

Then a voice came from heaven, “You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Mark 1:11, NKJV.

God the Father confirms this again at a later time, at the Mount of Olives, in the hearing of Peter, James and John. (Matthew 17:5, II Peter 1:17).

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A Crown of Beauty

By Winston S. Co

Luke recorded a fascinating incident in one of Jesus' visit to the synagogue one Sabbath morning in His hometown Nazareth. "And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised; to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, 'This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.' And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of

his mouth. And they said, 'Is not this Joseph's son?' He sat down and said: 'today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.' The people were amazed with the gracious words He spoke." (Luke 4:16-22)

This story is often overlooked. Yet, if studied thoroughly and understood in its full context, there are lessons that are quite interesting and inspiring, which are definitely worth learning and keeping.

Nazareth

Jesus grew up in Nazareth with His earthly family. He lived with His parents and siblings, and were known by the community and their neighbors. He was particularly known as the eldest among the siblings, and probably helped out His father in the carpentry business. Almost everyone in town knew who He was and the circumstances of His life. After His temptation by Satan, Jesus went out to preach the good news of the Kingdom of God. He went throughout the neighboring towns healing the sick and driving out demons. Then He came to His own

"His townsfolk heard the news of the miracles He performed in other towns; yet He was not greeted with warmth and exuberance upon His return. Rather, skepticism was all there was that they accorded Him."

hometown Nazareth where almost everyone knew Him. He was one of them. He lived among them. The townsfolk heard the news of the miracles he performed in other towns. Yet, He was not greeted with warmth and exuberance upon His return; rather skepticism was all there was that they accorded Him.

The “coldshoulder” reaction from his town mates simply indicated an apparent disregard of the miracles He performed in the neighboring villages. No one brought the sick nor any demon possessed person to be healed by Jesus - in contrast to the other towns and places He visited. Elsewhere, His message of the gospel was met with excitement. And sick people were brought to Him for healing. But in Nazareth, in His own hometown, none of these things happened. The welcome and reception was cold.

Preaching in the Synagogues

On the Sabbath, Jesus went to the synagogue as His custom was. Synagogue was the focal point for Jewish life during the time of Jesus. The Greek word synagogue means “a place of meeting.” The synagogue was a religious and social institution, second only to the temple in Jerusalem. It was also a substitute for temple worship especially if distance became a major consideration. A synagogue was usually a substantial structure built on the highest elevation of the neighboring houses. This was to give the site a sense of importance. Sometimes, they were richly furnished if the congregation or the sponsors were wealthy.

Every synagogue had a portable ark that stood opposite the entrance. This is the chest where the scrolls of the law were kept. There was also a platform with a reading desk from which the Scripture

of the day was read. Inside the synagogue, important people sat on benches called chief seats, which lined three sides of the room. Common people sat on the floor.

There were about 500 synagogues in Jerusalem during the time of Christ. They served as classrooms for religious instructions and meeting halls for council meetings and civic functions. On Sabbaths, they were the place of worship.

Read From the Scriptures

The synagogue is the place where people gather on the Sabbath day to study the law. Each synagogue had an organizer or leader called the “head of the synagogue” who was probably elected among the elders. The “head of the synagogue” who presided over the service, acted as instructor and host to visitors of the assembly.

The synagogue would have an attendant called “hazzan” who acted as the custodian of the property. His duties included the announcement to the village people of the beginning of the Sabbath on Friday afternoon and also of its close. As custodian, he was the one who took care of the scrolls of the law, brought forth the scroll for reading, and returned the scroll in its proper place after reading from it.

There were five parts to the worship service. They were prayers, psalm-singing, blessings, readings from the Scriptures, and commentaries on the sacred passages.

There was no official clergy in

a synagogue. The “head of the synagogue” usually a rabbi is recognized as the leader. In fact, any Jew who felt himself qualified or considered by many as qualified could be permitted to teach the Scriptures.

**Hear, O Israel:
The LORD our God,
the LORD is one!
You shall love
the LORD your
God with all your
heart, with all
your soul, and
with all your
strength.
Deuteronomy
6:4-5**

Torah readers sat in a special place called the “Moses Seat” or Seat of Honor; so named because they were reading “Moses” words. The speakers and readers would stand on a small platform to read and deliver the sermon. The formal activities in the synagogue were sequenced as follows:

1st part is the prayer. The prayer consisted of a recitation of the ‘Shema’ found in Deuteronomy

6:45 which reads “Hear, O Israel: Jehovah our God is one Jehovah: and thou shalt love

Jehovah thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.” Following the Shema was a prayer,

concluding with brief silence as an opportunity for individual silent prayer on the part of the members of the congregation.

The prayer was followed by psalm singing.

Then followed by sentences of praise to God

The reading of the Scriptures came next. A special section of the law that was assigned to be read on Sabbath days. But as time went on, the entire Pentateuch was divided into sections that gave a fixed cycle of one hundred fifty-four (154) lessons to be read in a definite period of time. The Jews would read through the Pentateuch every three years. During the time of Jesus, the Prophets were also used as shown in Jesus' reading in from the scroll of Isaiah (Luke 4:16).

A sermon followed the reading of the Scripture, explaining the portion that had been read. The sermon was closed with a blessing, pronounced by some priestly member of the congregation. If no person with priestly qualifications was present, a prayer was substituted for the blessing.

In the occasion of the Nazareth account, Jesus stood up to read from the scroll of Isaiah; then sat down and stood up again to explain the passage in a sermon. People were amazed at His teaching for no one ever spoke with authority like He did. Jesus gave a powerful and insightful message.

The question is: What did

Jesus preach on that particular day that astonished the listeners?

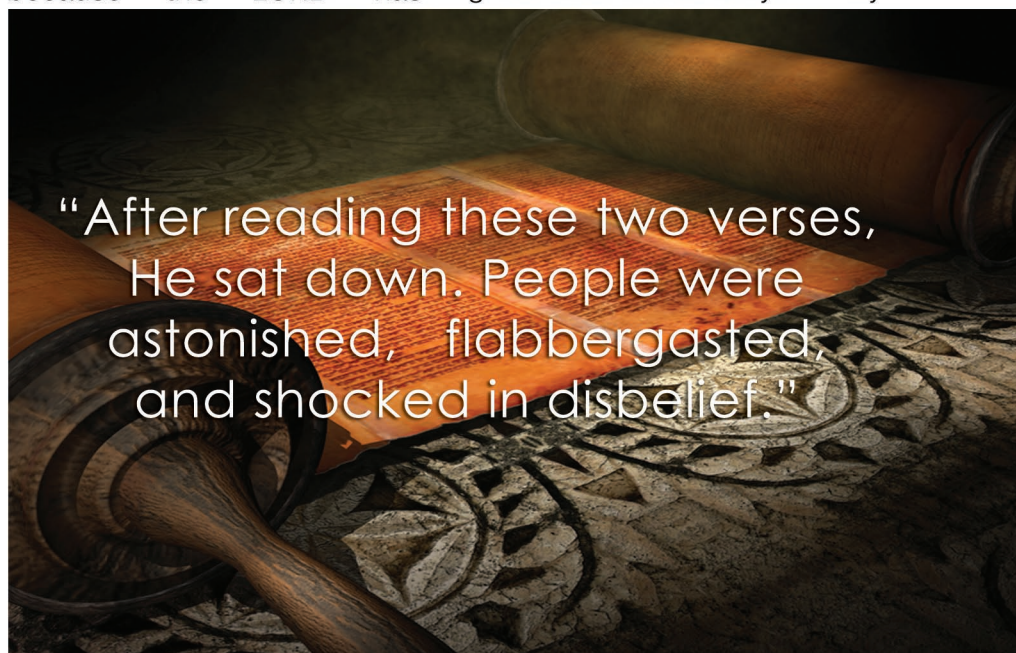
Isaiah The 61st Chapter

The Book of Isaiah chapter 61 is a messianic prophecy. It consists of 11 verses. It talks about the work of the Messiah – the anointed One of God. Jesus stood up to read verse 1 and part of verse 2. This is most interesting because Jesus read two short verses; then sat down.

Jesus read: "The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has

free the sinners and bring light to the world.

Then again He read: "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." The Messiah is to proclaim liberty throughout the land. This is a clear reference to the sacrificing work of Christ. The Messiah comes to pardon and give grace to all mankind. After reading these 2 verses He sat down. People were astonished in disbelief. They looked at Him - flabbergasted and shocked. The Jews knew exactly what He did by simply reading the scripture with a great deal of authority. They



"After reading these two verses, He sat down. People were astonished, flabbergasted, and shocked in disbelief."

anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners." The verse talks about the Anointed One in whom the Spirit of the Sovereign Lord rests upon. The Anointed One was the one to bring good news to God's people, to comfort the needy, to

knew Jesus was claiming Himself as the Messiah. When all eyes were on Him, Jesus further declared saying: "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." Luke 4:21. The listeners were even more shocked!

"All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips." Luke 4:22. Jesus probably stood up again this time to

explain what He had just read. Jesus would have proceeded to talk about God's most abundance grace and mercy for all.

Summary of Jesus' Mission

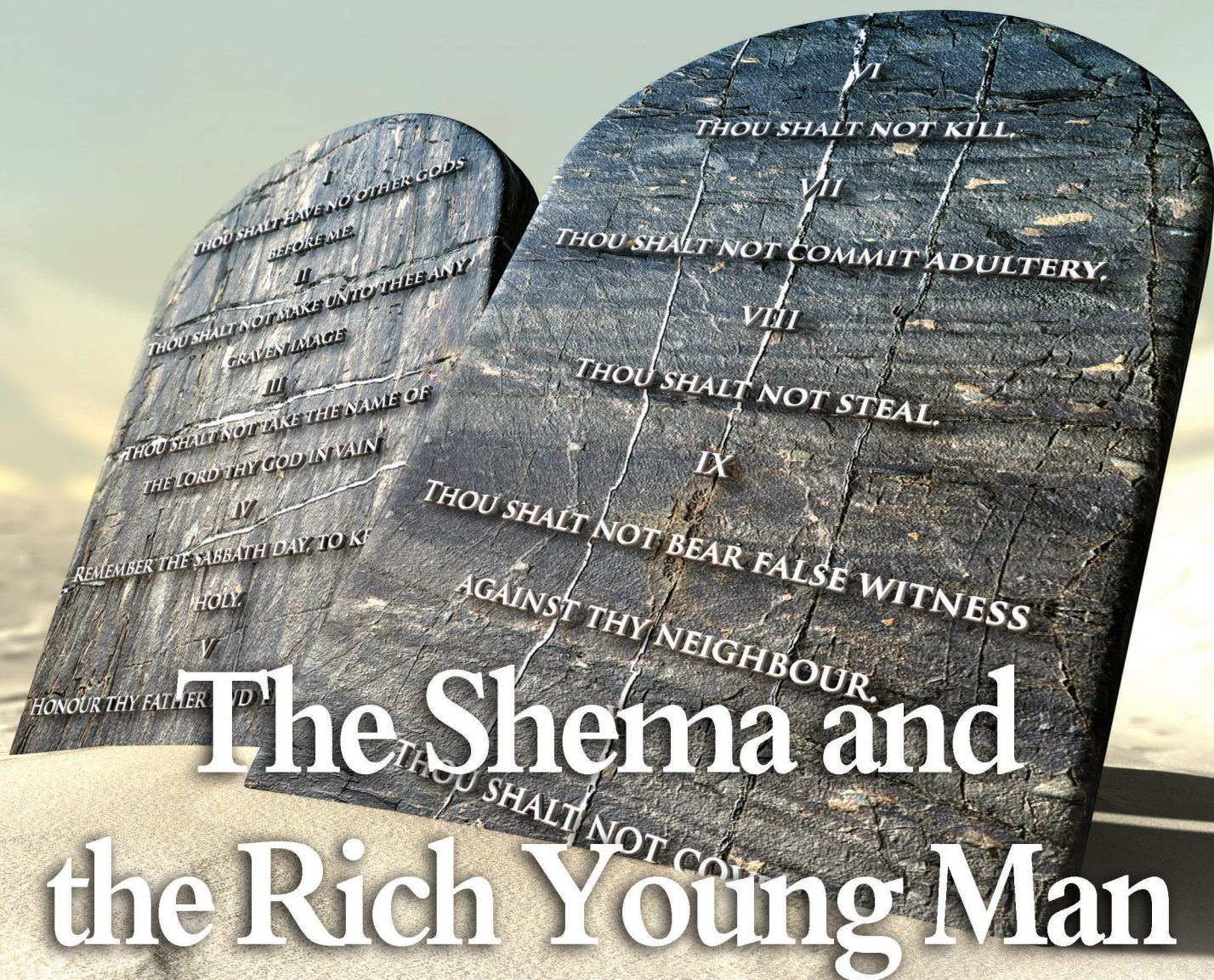
Jesus read the first two verses from the scroll of Isaiah 61 and sat down. That was what He came for the first time - to take away sin from the world. The latter part of verse 2 and 3 prophesied of His second coming. It talks about "the day of vengeance of our God." This prophecy deals with the events of the great tribulation that is to happen on the Day of the Lord. Upon Christ return, He is "to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion" is a direct allusion to the resurrection of the saints that will happen at the return of Christ. "To bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning" is an exact picture of the saints reigning with Christ in the Millennium; and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair is a clear reference to eternal life that the resurrected saints will inherit upon His return.

Finally, notice verse 4-6: "And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations. And strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the alien shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers. But ye shall be named the Priests of the LORD: men shall call you the Ministers of our God: ye shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory shall ye boast yourselves." (Isaiah 61:4-6)

These verses do not relate to Christ. They actually describe the resurrected saints and the role they will assume in the millennial reign of Christ. The

message of Jesus was simple and precisely true. He is the prophesied Messiah, and He came in the spirit of the sovereign Lord. He came to save the world from sin and proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God. He will come again. When He returns He will judge the world and His reward is with Him. How wonderful! Today, we believe His message and welcome it in our hearts because we are the main beneficiaries of His mission. Yes, all the saints will be bestowed with a crown of glory when our Lord and Savior returns. **AG**

They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations. Aliens will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards. And you will be called priests of the LORD, you will be named ministers of our God. You will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast.
Isaiah 61:4-6



The Shema and the Rich Young Man

By Eleno S. Mellomida

Since the dawn of history, man's quest to live forever remained steadfast. Up to this very day, "experts" in the science of prolonging life continue to grapple for solutions to extend man's lifespan. Probably, the same thought must have driven the rich young man when he approached Jesus and said, "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why do you call me good? There is none good but one, that is,

God. You know the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honor your father and mother. And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing you lack: go your way, sell whatsoever you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have

treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me." (Mar 10:18-21)

The commandments mentioned by Jesus are listed in the book of Exodus chapter 20. However, Jesus' reply to the rich man seems incomplete; He did not mention the first four commandments. Did Jesus purposely exclude it? If He did, can we know why?

Justifying the Omission

Tradition appears to have subscribed to the notion that the average Jew in Jesus' time may have already been aptly acquainted with the *shema*. The passage of scripture which became the main substance of the *shema* is found in Deuteronomy 6:5-9:

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And you shall love the LORD thy God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in your heart: And you shall teach them diligently unto your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up. And you shall bind them for a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. And you shall write them upon the posts of thy house, and on your gates."

Thus, if one delves deeply into the heart and core of the *shema*, it is a terse summation of the first four commandments listed in Exodus 20. These commandments has everything to do with man's relationship with God - the full embodiment of man's

obligation to his Maker. In effect, the *shema* summarizes and covers the entire purpose and intent of the first four commandments found in Exodus 20:3-11, which are:

- Thou shall have no other gods before Me.
- Thou shall not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: You shall not bow down yourself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD your God am a jealous God;
- Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that takes his name in vain.
- Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shall you labor, and do all your work: But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God: in it you shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger that is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.

The young man who asked Jesus how to gain eternal life may be familiar with the *shema* because if one would thoroughly digest the instructions therein, the emphasis of the command is something misunderstanding and forgetfulness cannot be utilized as an excuse. The language of the instruction is very clear. No intellectual advancement is needed to understand the wordings. Thus, there is no need for Jesus to repeat the *shema* to the young man. Right?

The "traditional" conclusion sounds practical, logical, and reasonable, isn't it? Personally, I like the explanation. It puts to rest the question of why Jesus mentioned only the last 6 commandments.

Repetition - the best form of Emphasis

However, the assumption leaves room for reasonable arguments. Because if you examine Jesus' methods of teaching, you don't have to second guess the lessons He wanted to convey. Jesus has the propensity of being repetitious. Most assuredly, He is a master communicator. Remember He is the word, the *logos*, the spokesman. (John 1:1) Every word that He spoke bears the clarity that cannot be misunderstood by those whose ears are eager to listen. The following passages will tell us He indeed really was: "You shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree brings forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree

" In effect the *shema* summarizes and covers the entire purpose and intent of the first four commandments found in Exodus 20:3-11."

brings forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that brings not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them." Mat. 7:16-20.

Clearly, the repetitious tone with which Jesus explained His teachings cannot be mistaken as coming from someone whose words are spoken in ambiguity. Here's another occasion to sustain that impression:

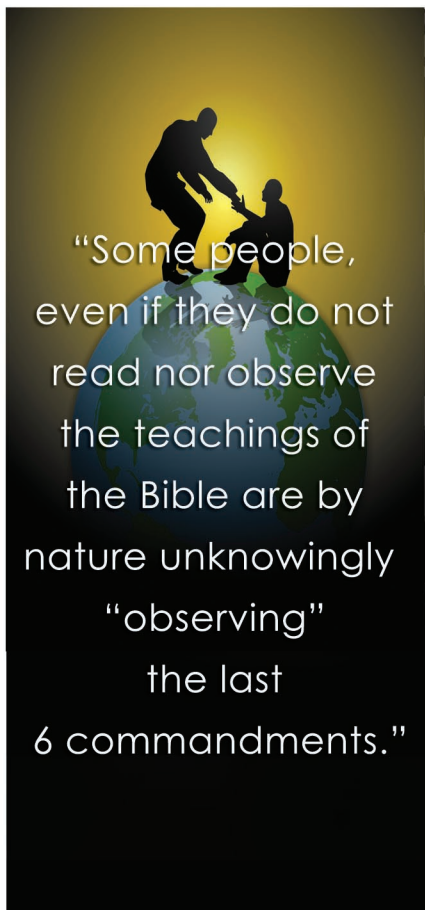
"So when they had dined, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, do you love Me more than these? He said unto him, Yea, Lord; you know that I love you. He said unto him, Feed my lambs. He said to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, do you love Me? He said unto him, Yea, Lord; you know that I love you. He said unto him, Feed my sheep. He said unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, do you love Me? *Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Do you love me? And he said unto him, Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you. Jesus said unto him, Feed my sheep.*" (John 21:15-17)

In this account, no one will misinterpret or misunderstand Jesus. Clear, emphatic and repetitious. In fact, Peter sounded like getting exasperated with His repetitiveness.

Why Six Commandments Only

This brings us back to the question about why Jesus told

the rich man the last six commandments only. Jesus' keen grasp of human nature allows Him to "gauge" men's motive (John 2:24-25). Besides, in any given community the rich will not go unnoticed; an observant neighborhood cannot be restrained from discussing the background of the famous. This probably contributed to Jesus' awareness of the man's background. There was no need for Jesus to emphasize the *shema* on him. By the looks of it Jesus can determine that the rich man was too engrossed in amassing wealth. The rich man wanted to enter the Kingdom of God, but he had second thoughts about keeping the first four commandments. Jesus can easily surmise that he was staunchly attached to his wealth than to make a 100% commitment to God. So, just as



"Some people, even if they do not read nor observe the teachings of the Bible are by nature unknowingly "observing" the last 6 commandments."

the man's dialogue with Jesus was short; it became even shorter when wealth became the topic of discussion. And the conversation ended with the rich man "walking away sorrowful because he had great possessions", (v-22.) The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches (Mat. 13:22) was too strong for the man to resist.

Christian Conversion & Human Goodness

The last 6 commandments which the rich man said he kept since childhood are basically designed to allow mankind to live peacefully and in harmony with each other. They are humanly beneficial and doable. Man by nature tends to observe it. Most communities, even if they do not read nor observe the teachings of the Bible, are by nature observing the 6 commandments. These are mechanisms that guarantee the preservation of human life. Anyone can keep it to the letter - even without spiritual conversion.

Society is not in dearth of good men and women. In fact some venture into philanthropic projects to help alleviate the plight of the less fortunate. Yet, most of them, in the biblical definition of what a real Christian is like, are far from being one. (*Request for a free copy of the booklet "How to be a Real Christian"*) The captains of industry have been generously putting up foundations for the less privilege. They established business empires to generate jobs for the masses. They



undertook philanthropic activities, donate to churches, back-up charitable institutions and NGO's – yet, if Jesus returns now, they will not enter the kingdom of God in their present status.

Even if they will hear the good news, it's very difficult for them to change their course of action. They may be sincerely driven with passion to share and to serve. Some probably wanted to contribute to a tranquil environment to avoid 'rocking the boat' so that their activities will not be hampered by tumultuous undertakings which may be initiated by those who think they have nothing to lose. For whatever reasons that drove them to become "philanthropic", they have at least to a degree practiced loving their neighbors. Their performances so far merely constitute human goodness.

Meanwhile, people with substantial means who decided to become true followers of Jesus are a rare breed. These are the men and women who take to heart Jesus admonition 'that a man's life does not consists in the abundance of the things that he possessed' (Luke 12:15) It is not an easy decision because wealth is everyone's pursuit. (Mat. 6:32)

Why love God first

If you love God first, you will automatically love your neighbor as yourself. Why? You will be imbued with His power, way of life, mindset, and His character. The more you submit to Him, the more His Spirit flows. It is the 'ingredient' that fulfills His love. You will

And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."

Luke 12:15

start bearing the fruits of His Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23 which will enable you to overcome human frailties and slowly draw your attitude closer to the mindset of Christ. (Ephesians 4:13)

On the other hand, if you love your neighbor as yourself first, it does not follow that you love God automatically. Jesus said even sinners love their fellow sinners as well. (Luke 6:32-34) There are many kindhearted people who are quick to organize relief brigades in times of calamity. More often, they are actively responsive than the religiously oriented individuals. Certainly their motives are driven by concern and welfare for their neighbors. Yet, they will not be granted eternal life when Jesus comes - at least not yet. They have yet to undergo the conversion process. (Acts 2:38)

Final Analysis

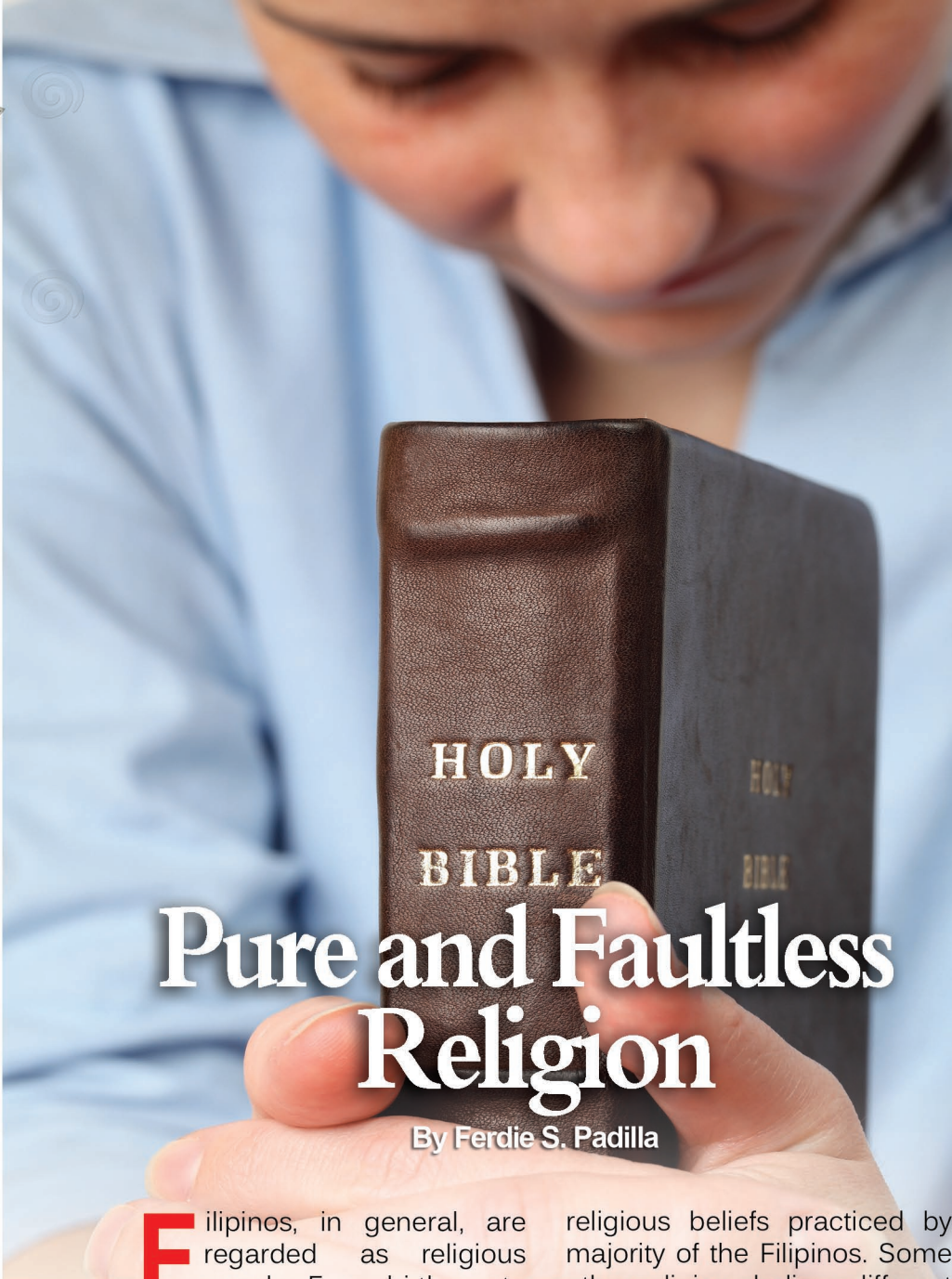
Finally, did the rich man kept all the commandments according to his claim? Jesus hinted he did not. There were 2 tests Jesus wanted the young man to comply:

• "Go your way, sell whatsoever you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven..." This has direct connection with 'loving your neighbor as yourself' – the embodiment of the last 6 commandments. Yet, sharing his wealth to the less fortunate

was probably not within the bounds of his social obligation.

• "Come, take up the cross, and follow Me." This is the main substance of the first 4 commandments – the spirit and essence of the *shema*. Both were unacceptable to the rich man. In contrast, you have Peter, Andrew, James and John, whom Jesus asked to follow Him; and without qualms and reservations, immediately left their occupations and followed Christ. (Mat. 4:18-22)

People who come to the church only for camaraderie, friendship and the need to belong do not last long. When they get offended, they immediately quit attending church. Our responsibility is to God first and foremost - the rest will automatically follow. The 1st commandment is what makes the difference. Jesus said: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:26) The qualifying rounds in gaining eternal life is first determined within the confines of the *shema* - which is to "love God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might. **AG**



Pure and Faultless Religion

By Ferdie S. Padilla

Filipinos, in general, are regarded as religious people. From birth up to the time they die, Filipinos participate in religious observances. Majority of babies born are "christened" after a few months from birth. As they grow older, they are inducted to an early religious life and are taught various religious concepts like going to heaven, that God is a trinity among others. People in the throes of death make a final confession in the hope of being forgiven and so enhance his or her chances of going to heaven. These are some of the

religious beliefs practiced by majority of the Filipinos. Some other religions believe different things, as we also come across some people who are non-believers in a Supreme Being for one reason or another.

What is religion? Religion has been defined as "the service and worship of God or the supernatural" or "a personal set or institutionalized system of religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices"(<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/religion>). Karl Marx, a German philosopher of Jewish ancestry once wrote, "Religion is the

sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opium_of_the_people). To him, religion is just a means for the suffering many to forget one's adversities, hence, the term "opium of the people." Opium is a drug known to have sedative and tranquilizing properties. It makes one relieved of the physical pain he or she is suffering from (even just temporarily). By this description, no matter how good it sounds, religion is just but a concept and is not meant to be taken seriously.

What the Bible says about Religion

The Bible describes religion very differently from the way scholars, philosophers or even theologians define, describe or talk about it. If we are to understand what religion is, the Bible is still the best source that will authoritatively define it for us. And its definition is very interesting. It is a definition devoid of scholarly, philosophical or theological air. Rather, it is a definition for everyone who is willing to practice it. In fact, the definition is not just about religion per se but also qualifying it as pure and faultless religion. It is found in James 1:26 - 27 (NIV) ;"If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in

their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by

widows, is God in his holy dwelling." But what has it got to

**If anyone among you thinks he is religious,
and does not bridle his tongue but deceives
his own heart, this one's religion is useless.**

[James 1:26]

the world." In this article, we will examine this passage a little bit more and see what we can learn.

Two Part Definition

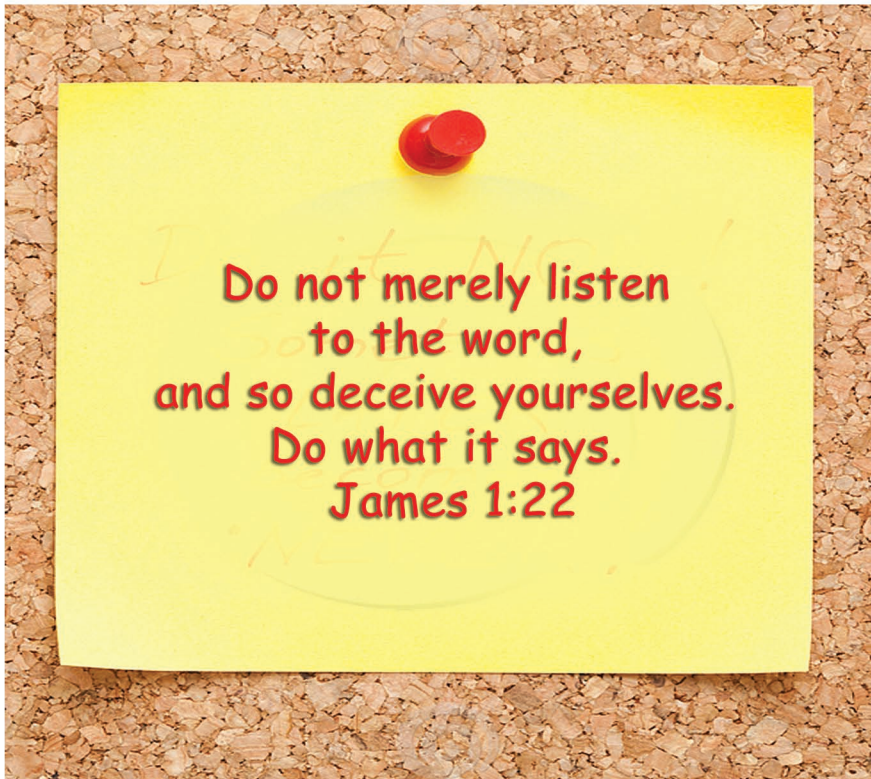
If we read the passage again, we will come to note that there are two parts of what religion is acceptable to God. The first part says "to look after orphans and widows in their distress"; the second one says "to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."

1.) "To look after orphans and widows in their distress" – For the technically inclined, it's not a definition of what constitutes religion. We all have been accustomed to definitions or descriptions like the one offered by the dictionary. If we think about it some more, we will notice that its emphasis is on action towards fellowman, but why single out orphans and widows? According to one commentary (Jamieson-Faussett-Brown Commentary on the Whole Bible, 1st edition), orphans are "peculiarly helpless". The helpless are first in our list of people to help because they practically have no one to turn to. Orphans and widows perfectly represent the helpless. The same commentary notes how God describes Himself in Psalms 68:5 (NIV): "5A father to the fatherless, a defender of

do with religion? Everything. God identifies Himself as One who looks after the helpless. If we believe in God, who looks after orphans and widows, then we are to proclaim that thru action. The apostle James says so in James 1:22 (NIV): Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." For religion to be of value to us, we must be able to apply what it teaches. It is not a good thing for people to just learn about the concept of loving his fellowman and after church service not act on it when an opportunity arises. Religion is worthless if we cannot discipline our tongues. Religion is not a once-a-week routine; it is a way of life. That way of life includes looking after the interests of others particularly those who have no one to look after them. Though orphans and widows are primary examples in the Bible they are not the only ones who may need our help, our care, our due attention, our kindness, our love. They could be anybody. They could be our immediate family members, our friends, our brothers and sisters in Christ, our co-workers or even a complete stranger. The important thing is we practice what we claim to believe in including watching our words. It is actually very

personal if we think about it some more. In this way religion is not just a concept but something concrete. It should have a personal meaning to us and that it should make a difference in our lives.

2.) "To keep oneself from being polluted by the world" – If the first part is action oriented, the second part goes deeper. Nevertheless, it still requires action on our part. The second part is more about going to the basics of what we believe in – the driving force behind our actions. Let us explain that by asking and answering several questions: First, we ask, what is it in the world that pollutes us? If we know what pollutes us, then we ask - how do we keep ourselves free from being polluted by the world? To answer the first question, this article will offer one or two instances, among the many mentioned in your Bible, we can become polluted with if we are not careful. Let us go to Leviticus 11:41 - 43 (NIV); Every creature that moves about on the ground is detestable; it is not to be eaten. You are not to eat any creature that moves about on the ground, whether it moves on its belly or walks on all fours or on many feet; it is detestable. Do not defile yourselves by any of these creatures. Do not make yourselves unclean by means of them or be made unclean by them." In other words, we are to keep the food laws in order for us not to be defiled or polluted. And we have to emphasize it is not a "physical law" but rather a spiritual one, in the same league with the Ten



Commandments. We should all take note of this for it is a basic biblical doctrine. No matter what people say, the food laws are very much in effect.

Another way to defile or pollute ourselves is found in Leviticus 18:20 (NIV) - "Do not have sexual relations with your neighbor's wife and defile yourself with her." But guess what? It is another way of saying the commandment against adultery. Therefore, if we are to keep ourselves from being polluted by the world, we are to observe the Ten Commandments and all other laws given by God. These laws are safeguards for us to be free from being polluted by the world. And that is exactly what James had in mind in James 1:22 - 25 (NIV) : "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it

says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man, who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom [freedom from what? Freedom from the pollutants of the world], and continues to do this [meaning, it has to be maintained as a way of life], not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does." So what are the answers to our questions: In order to keep oneself from being polluted by the world, we are to obey God's laws.

Pure and Faultless Religion

So what is pure and faultless religion? Based on what we have read so far, pure and faultless religion involves right doctrine resulting to right

action. These two always go hand in hand. The true and correct doctrines would fuel our actions in the right direction.

This is the kind of religion that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, the prophets, the apostles and every man and woman of faith recorded in the Bible had preached and practiced. We cannot say we have real faith unless we put our faith in the true God. We cannot really say we practice love as prescribed in the Bible if we do not understand first that God is a God of love. We have to understand first who and what God is before we can live the kind of life He prescribes. And yet today, many professing Christians do not know who the true God is, as shocking that may seem. They don't know His true nature and His laws and therefore, they practice religion that is not acceptable to God (harsh that statement maybe).

We may have heard many sermons on faith and love from other preachers before. Some may have moved us, at least for the duration of the sermon. Maybe they were inspirational in some ways and maybe quite uplifting, but after the sermon is through, the message does not seem to hold any meaning at all. It's like eating food that could never satisfy. Something is missing. Why? It's because the ones who gave them were not really grounded on sound and solid Biblical doctrines. We may have heard Christian - living sermons or read some of them in the context of a Christmas or Easter

They believed first about the Kingdom of God coming soon to this very Earth, and based on that faith they admonished others to repent and then live a godly life so that they too may participate in the promises.

are not taught by the Bible and no matter how preachers incorporate Christian living into it, it will not hold water. Contrast that with the powerful messages given by the apostles Paul, Peter, James, John in their letters. They also talk about faith, hope, love and all other things about Christian living and yet they cut through our hearts and leave a powerful and lasting impression on us. Paul extensively talks about hope in a future resurrection

and gives people a real hope to look forward to. It is a great comfort to many of us who have lost loved ones. And we can put our faith in this event because he also talks about faith in a different light, as something that is concrete, real, actionable and sure as opposed to "blind faith" that many preach. John talks about love as being the very nature of God. All of the apostles talk about the laws of God as love-based. Love is not some empty word or emotion to them. They knew where they were coming from when they talked about it. They saw, felt and experienced the embodiment of love during

the time Jesus Christ was with them. They learned firsthand from Christ and they also believed first that He was the very Son of God who came to die for mankind's sins.

They believed first about the Kingdom of God coming soon to this very Earth, and based on that faith they admonished others to repent and then live a godly life so that they too may participate in the promises.

This is the kind of religion, pure and faultless – that we should strive to live by. Religion is not some distant concept that we cannot understand; neither is it mysterious nor burdensome. If we understand what it is, and hopefully we are a step closer to understanding it, we all would benefit from practicing it. **AG**

[Continued from page 2]

The Boy who cried "Wolf!"

'The boy who cried wolf' is one unforgettable story during elementary days, whose lesson appropriately applies to the topic at hand. Predicting earthshaking events on the basis of humanly founded calculations can only be construed as an outcome of guesswork and speculation. On the other hand, most bible believers understand that catastrophic and horrifying events leading to the second coming of Christ will definitely happen. This is probably one belief where the vast majority of bible readers are in agreement.

So, what is wrong with all these humanly "inspired" prognostications especially about the "end of the world"? What are the dangers that may result from these alarming trend of false alarms? Who could be possibly responsible in inspiring these supposedly "precise and exact timing" of events which in turn preempted Jesus' own prophetic pronouncements in the gospels?

Source of Lies

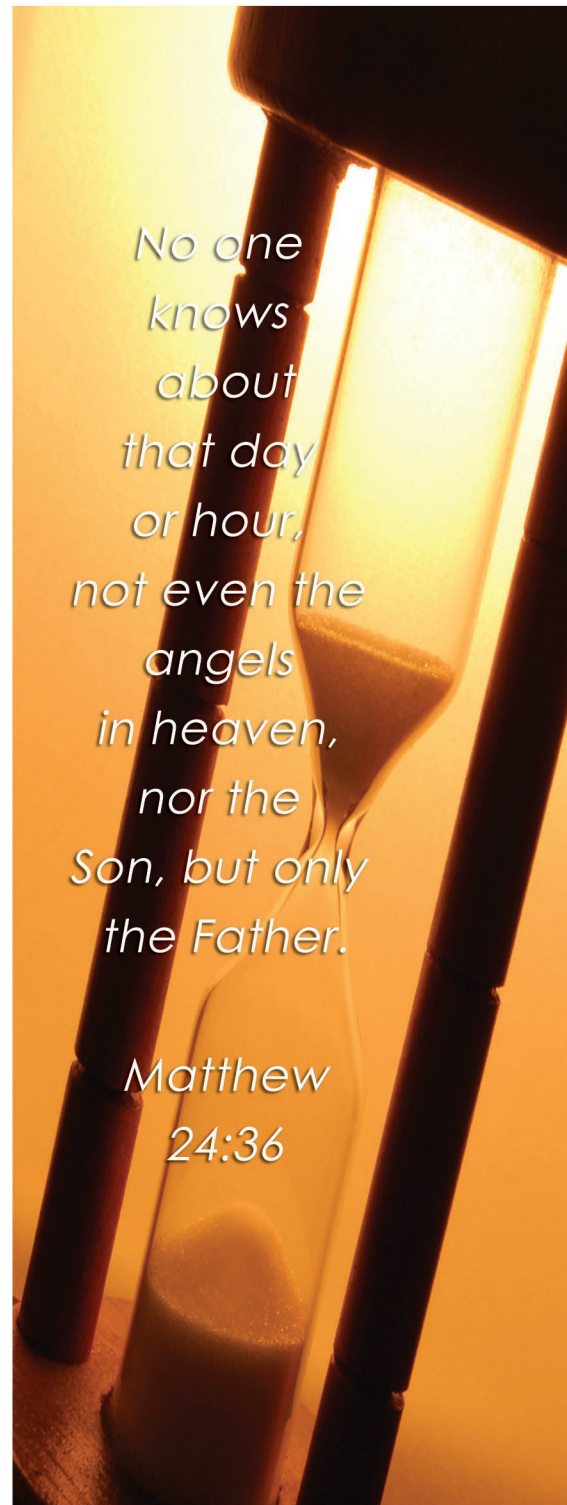
Jesus said Satan is the father of lies, John 8:44. Satan means adversary. Adversary to whom? Naturally against the One whom he had been longing to usurp and dethrone! Notice: "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will

exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. (Isaiah 14:12-14)

Satan has successfully influenced all facets of human activity. He is the great deceiver, and he deceives the whole world. (Rev. 12:9) And religion is one aspect where his deceptive efforts are highly concentrated. And mind you, not just any religion, but the ones which are identified with and carry the name of his foremost adversary, Jesus Christ.

How will one discredit an adversary? Impute motives. Duplicate, falsify and create spurious but identical almost true to form copy of the owner's original design to create doubts in the authenticity of the genuine material. The main objective is to invalidate and discredit its genuineness; make it appear as a hoax, and ensure that the reality will be overshadowed with false alarms until the credibility of the truth will be finally shattered.

In reference to His second coming and the 'end of the world', Jesus outlined a series of events that will precede thereof; the first of which is recorded in Matthew 24:3-5: "And as He sat upon the Mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be, and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? And Jesus answered and said unto them,



No one
knows
about
that day
or hour,
not even the
angels
in heaven,
nor the
Son, but only
the Father.

Matthew
24:36

Take heed that no man deceive you. For many **shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.**" Deception will definitely happen within the community

called Christianity – the one and only faith that devotedly carry, used and invoked the name of Christ.

Source of Truth

Jesus said, "I am the way, **the truth**, and the life...", John 14:6; and Paul confirmed that "...**the truth** is in Jesus, Ephesians 4:21. So what did Jesus say about the 'end of the world' and the cataclysmic occurrences prior to His second coming that gave rise to so many speculations and urgent prophetic utterances of men? This space won't be able to accommodate all that are about to happen according to Christ.

However, one thing He assured us all: But of that day and hour knows no man, no, not the angels of heaven, not even the Son, but my Father only. (Mat 24:36) Then He advised the reader to: Watch you therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man. (Luke 21:36) Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house

to be broken up. Therefore be you also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. (Mat 24:42-44)

Watching involves a keen observation of what is happening in the world scene - politically, economically and environmentally. Anticipating the events that will shake this world in its foundations cannot be obtained from emotionally charged and speculative utterances by self-appointed prognosticators. There are definite signs that Jesus Himself pointed out, and they are spoken in His own words in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21.

The events leading to the "end of the world" and the second coming of Christ - based on the words of Jesus Himself - will be the subject of discussion in the upcoming series of Bible Studies to be presented by the Church of God International. Venue and dates of these meetings will be announced in newspapers of major circulation. You owe it to yourself to watch. **AG**

ARMOR OF GOD FEATURE : *Jesus in the Gospel of John*

[Continued from page 4]

Today, Jesus being God's Son is a commonly-accepted truth and popular teaching among the traditional religious communities. But in the days of the Roman Empire, there were very few that believed that Jesus is the Son of God. They all knew and remember him as a little child, the firstborn son of Joseph and Mary. In fact, Jesus was well-known among them as the carpenter's son, he lived as one among them up to his thirties (Mark 6:3). Thus, in the province of Galilee, the neighboring towns and even in Jerusalem, Jesus was just another Jew, a descendant of their ancestor Judah.

The apostle John knew the true identity of Jesus, and he wanted us to know this simple, straightforward, yet very important truth. **The Lord Jesus is the very Creator—the Son of God.** This is the profound message of the "gospel according to John". This truth is the very foundation and hope of our salvation—that the very Creator came to save His own creation. (John 1:10-12, 29)

May this knowledge and understanding guide us into having a deeper relationship with Jesus, and the Father. **AG**

(Note: all scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version and the New King James Version translations)

PROPHECIES THAT NEVER FAIL

History is littered with doomsday predictions of men that have come and gone. The question often asked is “why prophecies fail”? Peter opined: “...no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” (2 Peter 1:20-21)

What then does God’s word tell us about the future? Can we know the events leading to the much talked about “end of the world”? For sure we will, if it came from the words of Christ who said: Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away, Mat 24:35. All these will be the subject of discussion in the forthcoming series of Bible Studies scheduled below.

BIBLE STUDY SCHEDULES

Every First Sabbath [Saturday] of the Month

MANILA
EDSA SHANGRI-LA HOTEL
MANDALUYONG CITY
TEL. NO. 02 995 05 77
2:00 PM - 5:00 PM

ILOILO CITY
ILOILO MIDTOWN HOTEL
YULO STREET
TEL. NO. 033 337 5882
2:00 PM - 5:00 PM

NAGA CITY
VILLA CACERES HOTEL
MAGSAYSAY AVENUE
TEL. NO. 0920 301 2493
9:00 AM - 11:00 AM

Every Second Sabbath [Saturday] of the Month

CEBU CITY
THE APPLE TREES SUITES
22 J. LLORENTE ST.
FUENTE OSMENA AREA,
TEL. NO. 0915 908 2940
2:00 PM - 5:00 PM



THE CHURCH OF GOD INTERNATIONAL MEETING PLACES

Manila

6th Floor, Peaksun Building,
Princeton St. [Along Shaw Blvd.]
Mandaluyong City, Saturdays 10:00 a.m.

Naga

Villa Caceres Hotel, Naga City
Saturdays 10:00 a.m.

Alabang

Max Restaurant, Metropolis Star Mall, Alabang
Muntinlupa City, Saturdays, 2:00 p.m.

Malolos

Hiyas Convention Center - Governance Bldg.
Malolos City, Saturdays, 2:00 p.m.

Mindanao

Alson's Palace
Maranding, Lala
Lanao del Norte, Saturdays, 1:00 p.m.

Cebu City

The Apple Trees Suites,
22 J. Llorente St.,
Fuente Osmeña Area,
Saturdays, 2:00 p.m.

Iloilo City

Iloilo Midtown Hotel
Yulo Street
Saturdays, 2:00 p.m.

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