

October - December 2013

# ARMOR OF GOD

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH

## Obedience

A TIMELESS VIRTUE

- Obedience : A Timeless Virtue
- Slavery & Freedom
- Biblical Principles for Attaining True Success
- The Pool Bethesda

## What a Friend We have in Jesus...

**I**s a famous Christian song written and composed by Joseph Scriven in 1855 and revived by C.C. Converse in 1868. None among you readers were born yet; Jose Rizal was 7 years old then! But, up until today, the melody and the lyrics of this song continue to reverberate inside the walls of Christian congregations. The inspiring lines suggest that the pain and suffering we keep carrying in life can be brought before Jesus' presence via a heartrending prayer. And Jesus made assurance to relieve us of the burdens we are faced with, saying, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

What else does friendship with Jesus entail? What are the privileges of one whose friend is Jesus? Jesus openly tells us that, "You are My friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you" (John 15:14-15).

Can you grasp the magnitude of Jesus' statement? In a way He is saying there is nothing that He knows that will not be revealed to you. Simply put, there are no mysteries surrounding God's plan and purpose for the true friends of Jesus. You are well-informed where others are ignorant. To His disciples He said, "To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables" (Mark 4:11).

Christ, as this publication repeatedly emphasizes (on the basis of clear scriptural revelation), is the God of the Old Testament and the Creator Himself, (John 1:1-14; Col. 1:13-19; Hebrews 1:1-2; John 8:58). Now, James said Abraham is a friend of God (James 2:23). What did Christ tell Abraham before deciding to annihilate Sodom and Gomorrah? Jesus said, "Shall I hide from Abraham the things I intend to do? (Genesis 18:17). Based on the dialogue that followed, the answer is no.

A close friend has nothing to hide. He is a complete confidant; the first refuge in times of distress; one whom you can lean on when you have no one to turn to. Some people die for a cause - rightly or wrongly. Some are willing to take a bullet for a friend. But no one will die for an enemy. Jesus died for everyone, friends and foes alike (Romans 5:6, 10). If He did that, all the more then is He willing to lay down His life for a friend (John 15:13). That's the kind of a friend we have in Jesus! If you are not yet His friend, are you willing to become one? Then I suggest you study closely the first sentence of John 15:14.

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**I**t is common knowledge that a society is nothing more than a group of families being put together. Now, it is impossible for a family to stay intact permanently if obedience is not upheld as one of the guiding principles in its day to day affairs. Obedience is a rewarding way of life that needs to be instilled first in the family before any society can hope to produce law abiding citizens.

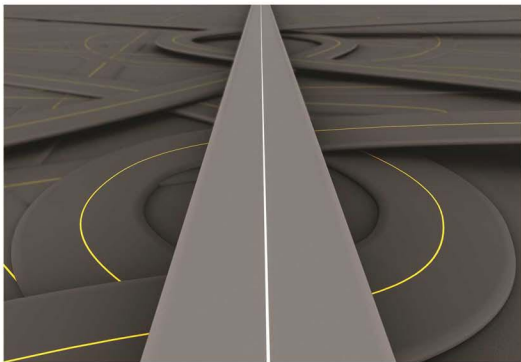
# Obedience

## A Timeless Virtue

*by Winston S. Co*

### Obedience in the Family

Parents, how do you know your children love you? Children, how do you show your love to your parents? As adults, how do you love, honor and show respect to the man and woman who became the "first cause" of your physical existence? Expressing your love, honor and respect to your parents can only be made manifest through simple obedience. Paul said: Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord (Colossians 3:20). And he gave additional instructions and emphasized the benefits of those who are obedient saying: Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honor thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise), that it may be well with you, and you may live long on the earth (Ephesians 6:1-3).



### Loving God through Obedience

Now, the well-known prayer all Christians ought to be familiar with tells us that we have a Father in heaven (Matthew 6:10-15). As children of God therefore, how do we show our love for Him and for His Son Jesus Christ who also considers us as His brothers and sisters (Hebrews 2:12-13). In John's gospel, Jesus tells us how, He said: If ye love me, keep my commandments (John 14:15). He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him." Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, "Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?" Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me. (John 14:21-24).

Therefore, the manifestation of our love towards God is to keep His commands. John wrote: For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not burdensome (1 John 5:3). Contrary to the belief of some, God's commandments are not burdensome; neither are they restrictive let alone deterrent in wanting to live the life of a true Christian.

Instead, they are a delight as the psalmist wrote: Blessed is the man that walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law does he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of

water, that brings forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he does shall prosper (Psalm 1:1-3).

Again King David in Psalms 119:24 said: Your testimonies also are my delight and my counselors. Give me understanding, and I shall keep your law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart. Make me to go in the path of your commandments; for therein do I delight (Psalms 119:34-35).

If you really love God you would keep all His commandments for all His commandments are a delight. If you dislike someone, all his words are an affront to you. To love God is to delight in His words and obey them.

Sometimes, there is wisdom behind the perspective even by those who do not espouse

belief in the God of the bible. Take note for example of Pharaoh's perception in Exodus 5:2: He said, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go." What Pharaoh said is true. If you do not know God nor honor him, surely it makes no sense to obey Him. On the other side of the "pendulum", why was Abraham considered the "father of the faithful"? Notice how confident God was with Abraham's obedience: "And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the

Paul said: Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord (Colossians 3:20).

LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him" (Genesis 18:17-19).

### **Sin and Disobedience**

Deliberate and willful disobedience to God's command is a sin of rebellion against God. You rebel against someone because you dislike him and his commands. This is what the writer of Hebrews said: "But with whom was he grieved forty years? Was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom swore He that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief" (Hebrews 3:17-19).

worst of all they blamed God for bringing them out of Egypt. Their refusal to possess the land as instructed was an outright rebellion against God. Only Joshua and Caleb were allowed to enter the land while the rests were told to go back to the wilderness. (Deut. 1:26-40)

**2. *Do things the way God forbids it.*** God's instructions were very clear as Moses repeated it saying, "Go forward and occupy it in fulfilment of the promise which the Lord the God of your fathers made to you; do not be discouraged or afraid." But the people dilly-dallied and came up with a cowardice idea of "spying the land first" before making a move. This hesitant gesture on their part clearly violated a

### **Faithfulness through Obedience**

After detailing the rebelliousness of Israel, the encouragement of God is to be faithful and obedient. The charge is written in Deuteronomy Chapters 4 to 11.

How are we to love God? The answer is to be faithful in obeying all His commands. Anything else pales in comparison to them! James said: You believe that there is one God; you do well: the devils also believe, and tremble (James 2:19). The demons knew God and trembled at His presence, yet they were disobedient. What good is it then to know God and yet disobey His commands? That simply makes us at par with the demons!

### **Obedience to God - the only choice of Christians**

Now, there are instances where God "regretted" His decision. One of which is His making Saul the king of Israel (1 Samuel 15:11). The account of Saul's disobedience is recorded in 1 Samuel 15:22-23: "And Samuel said, Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected thee from being king."

Obedience is what makes us children of God. Knowing God and His laws do not

If you really love God you would keep all His commandments for all His commandments are a delight.

That unbelief, which was an apparent rebellion against God happened during Israel's sojourn in the desert and is recorded in Deuteronomy chapters 1 to 4. Now, Deuteronomy Chapters 1 to 3 detailed three (3) ways how rebellion against God is committed:

**1. *Refusal to do what God commands.*** God promised Israel to bring them to a goodly land where they will enjoy freedom and prosperity. After a long journey, lo and behold they were already at the tip of the promise land. But instead of occupying it as God told them, they were hesitant and came up with excuses, and

direct command to "go forward and occupy". (Deut. 1:19-25)

**3. *Doing things God forbids.*** Knowing that they will be refused entry to the land, Israel decided to change their mind and prepared to attack to possess the land. This time God forbid them saying He will not fight with them; but Israel went ahead and they were overwhelmed and beaten by its inhabitants. (Deut. 1:41-46)

This was how the Israelites rebelled against God and how God's anger was kindled. This is what we all need to take heed and avoid.

automatically make you a righteous person. Righteousness belongs to those who diligently obey the law (Romans 2:13, Hebrews 5:9). This absolutely agrees with what Jesus said in Matthew 7:21-22: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."

Verse 23: "Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" How true! Even if one preaches the gospel but does not do God's will by obeying His commandments, he is prone to become an evildoer.

Who then is one who truly loves God? Answer: But whoso keeps his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him (1 John 2:5).

There is true blessing in obedience, both physical and spiritual. Notice: "And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: And all these blessings shall come on thee,

and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God" (Deuteronomy 28:1-2). Jesus said: "...blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it" (Luke 11:28).

Finally, Jesus commanded: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matthew 28:19-20). **AG**

And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God"  
(Deuteronomy 28:1-2).

# Slavery & Freedom

by Eleno S. Mellomida



*Slavery is forcing anyone to do something for somebody through coercion, threat, intimidation, subjugation, and deception. The slave is paid nothing for the services rendered and is not allowed to walk free. Slavery is the worst that can happen to anyone. While the "shackle and chain" system may have been rendered obsolete (except in penal institutions), slavery has taken a new name called forced labor, but it has the same cruel effect.*

According to the International Labor Organization, an estimated 21 million people are still subjected to forced labor. That maybe a very minute percentage of the entire labor force, but it is still ironic considering that human and civil rights organizations are actively campaigning against

the practice. The "right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" is highlighted in the preamble of the United States constitution; and most of the "free world" countries subscribed to its principles and ideals. Unfortunately, forced labor continues to happen even in the 21st century.

## Slavery, not God's Will

Slavery is not God's will. It started when Israel rejected God's rule and demanded for a human king to rule over them (1 Samuel 8:7; 1 Samuel 10:17-19). The people's clamor was not pleasing to God, nevertheless He allowed it, and warned them that their rulers would just exploit them.

Note the incident. "Samuel told all the words of the LORD unto the people that asked of him a king. And he said, 'This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots. And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots. And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants. And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king

*which ye shall have chosen you; and the LORD will not hear you in that day. Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles."*  
(1 Samuel 8:10-20)

When God created man, it was not included in His agenda that man would rule and subdue his fellowman. God told the first man and woman to rule, have dominion over and subdue the rest of the creation which are inferior to their kind. Notice: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth" (Genesis 1:26-28).

Jesus Himself disapproved an autocratic system of leadership. Sensing His disciples' inclination to imitate the rulers during that time, "Jesus called them unto him, and said, You know that the princes of the Gentiles

Not all are "born" entrepreneurs;  
but managers and entrepreneurs will not  
attain their goals without people  
working for them.

exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many (Mat. 20:25-28).

"Lording it over", "bossism" and "dictatorial management" are inconsonant with Jesus' kind of leadership. The apostle Peter echoed the same warning to the church elders saying: "Feed the flock of God

which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:2-3).

#### **Labor and Management**

Now, it is impossible for a society to progress without people working for somebody. And it is equally impossible to achieve prosperity without the men and women who possess managerial and entrepreneurial skills. Both must cooperate and work together to achieve their objectives or maximize productivity. The truth is, not



everyone possesses the fortitude of adventurism and the gumption to take the risk where others are hesitant to explore. Not all are "born" entrepreneurs but managers and entrepreneurs will not attain their goals without people working for them. This calls for an interdependent relationship.

If people work for others, definitely there is what we would call a quid-pro-quo arrangement. "You do this I'll pay you, I'll do that you pay me" type of a deal. This arrangement underscores Jesus' principle that "the laborer is worthy of his hire".

The parable of Jesus recorded in Mat. 20:1-7 outlined a principle that can be construed as fair to labor and management. An offer to hire was made, and the laborers accepted. Take note that the compensation package was mutually agreed upon by both parties at the very start (verse 2). There were no third parties involved. There were no CBA's drawn, no labor arbiters presiding. The hiring was direct and the terms of the agreement were clearly settled at the start. Of course the early workers tried to "reasonably" complain and attempted to amend the original terms, but the owner invoked the unalterable feature of the agreement and emphasized his prerogative to decide on the things that belonged to him.

#### **Abraham and His Servants**

Abraham had servants. But he treated them fairly. In fact, he commissioned one of them to perform a delicate task - to

The Hebrew word for "taskmaster" is *nagas* meaning to drive an animal, a workman, a debtor; to harass or tyrannize.

preserve the godly line of his descendant (Gen. 24:2-10). This wouldn't happen if you are not in good terms with your servants - especially if as an owner you are always suspicious with those who are working for you. You may install safeguards, but you have to provide certain latitudes so that a mutually beneficial relationship will flourish. In Abraham's case, confidence and trust was clearly established between the master and the servant. This alone will tell us that the servant-master relationship was one of symbiosis rather than absolute servitude on the part of the helper.

You will not find Abraham, Isaac or Jacob referred to as "taskmaster". How can we know? God Himself made advance assessment that Abraham and his descendants would abide by His commands to do justice. God's testimony revealed what kind of person Abraham was. God said, "For I know him, that he will

command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him" (Gen. 18:19).

The Hebrew word for taskmaster is *nagas*. It means to *drive* an animal, a workman, a debtor; to harass, and to tyrannize. Pharaoh and his cohorts did that to Israel (Exodus 1:8-14), and although they are long dead, buried and mingled into the ground, the legacy of their cruelty continues and still is emulated by some unto this very day.

Slavery is the harshest form of exploitation. It is the epitome of abuse and the height of taking advantage against a fellow human being. It may sound pleasant to call our countrymen as OFWs, or the house-helper by a more likeable term "aide" or 'kasambahay'; but if the treatment has all the

appearance of harshness and gross inequality, it is undoubtedly synonymous to slavery.

### Slavery in Israel

During the time of Israel, the more affluent class had bondservants. Either these bondservants were bought or owed money, left with zero "fallback position" that they simply took the last option as bondservants. However, their rights were still protected. God Himself issued decrees for their security and protection. They were accorded with far better incentives than some of the so-called "liberated" yet unjustly dealt with househelpers nowadays.

Deuteronomy 15:12-15 tells us how: "And if your brother, a Hebrew man, or a Hebrew woman, be sold unto you, and serve you six years; then in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you. And when you send him out free from you, you shall not let him go away empty: you shall furnish him liberally out of your flock, and out of your floor, and out of your vinepress: of that wherewith the LORD your God has blessed you, you shall give unto him. And you shall remember that you were a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you: therefore I command you this thing today." This sounds more of an employment rather than enslavement.

### Slavery in Egypt

What then was it like to be a slave in Egypt? It was slavery in the strictest sense of the word. Unlike the bondservants in Israel, the bondservants in



Egypt were completely in bondage. They were treated mercilessly, harshly and ruthlessly.

Notice: "Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph. And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we: Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land. Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they

were grieved because of the children of Israel. And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour: And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field: all their service, wherein they made them serve was with rigour" (Exodus 1:8-14).

### Slave to Sin

Physical slavery and its effects in its worst form are incomparable to the kind of slavery Christians may succumb to and fall under. Sinfulness is the more "lethal" form of slavery. We are enslaved to sin which is far more fatal than physical enslavement. For a long time we have been tied up with the world's ways, its systems and its traditions. And the world's

Slavery is the harshest form of exploitation. It is the epitome of abuse and the height of taking advantage against a fellow human being.

ways are not compatible with godliness. Certainly it is not easy to depart from our habits that took years to develop inside our persona – habits that are diametrically opposite to the will of our Father in heaven. All our activities, perspectives, way of life, mindset are not attuned but are contrary to the way of life prescribed in the word of God (Titus 3:3).

Since all have sinned then (Romans 3:23) and broken God's law (1 Jn. 3:4), the wages we earned out of it is death (Rom.6:23). This kind of death has a remote chance of revival according to Jesus. He said: "Except you repent, you shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3,5). Perish in Greek original is *apollumi*; it means to destroy fully. Thankfully, it has an antidote in the form of repentance to prevent us from dying permanently. Repentance involves a complete change in the way we manage our lives; it means to turn around from the path we habitually walk through and decide to embrace God's way of life revealed in His word.

It also means a sincere acceptance of the saving power of God through Christ because the Father made it possible for everyone to escape the imminent spiritual death and made an offer for everyone to live forever (John 3:16). He opened our understanding that through the sacrifice of His Son we can be cleansed of all our sins and be free from the penalty of death and start walking towards the way of salvation, and eventually enter His kingdom.

### Complete Freedom

After their liberation from Egypt, God warned Israel not to 'go back' to Egypt and become slaves again (Deut. 17:16). Egypt represented slavery, and slavery is not only limited to sin but also to the customs and traditions of men that are abominable to the Lord. He reminded Israel to observe the Sabbath because He wanted them to enjoy as a free people and told them that enslavement was not what He wanted them to become (Deut. 5:14-15).

To the 21st century Christians, the parallelism is appropriate. The only difference is that the freedom God wants us to have is all encompassing compared to that of Israel. God wants us to

For the created universe waits with eager expectation for God's sons to be revealed. It was made the victim of frustration, not by its own choice, but because of Him that made it so; yet always there was hope, because the universe itself is to be freed from the shackles of mortality and enter upon the liberty and splendor of the children of God. Up to the present we know the whole created universe groans in all its parts as if in the pangs of childbirth. Not only so, but even WE (people of God), to whom the Spirit is given as FIRSTFRUIT of the harvest to come, are groaning inwardly while we wait for

All our activities, perspectives, way of life, mindset are not attuned but are contrary to the way of life prescribed in the word of God .

be free from the certainty of imminent death and to avail of the opportunity to live forever. This kind of freedom will assure us that even if our physical body will return to the ground from which it was made, a life that is free from pain, a life impervious against all kinds of ailments will be granted at the return of Christ through a resurrection from mortal to immortality (1 Cor. 15:51-55; 1 Thes. 4:16-17; John 5:25,28,29; Rom. 2:6-7).

Regarding that freedom, the New English Bible had it colorfully written:

God to make us His sons and set our whole body FREE (Romans 8:19).

Finally, Paul in Galatians 5:1 wrote: It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery (NASB). Do you want to be part of those who will experience the kind of freedom our Lord and Savior wants us to have? The contact information listed at the last page of this publication is readily available for you to make inquiries. AG

# Biblical Principles for Attaining True Success

(Last Of A Three Part Series)

by Ferdie S. Padilla



**I**n the previous article (Biblical Principles for Attaining Success, Armor of God, Jan-Mar 2013 issue), we had tackled 5 biblical principles for attaining success in this lifetime: hard work, having a sound plan, having the right knowledge, applying wisdom and seeking God. We said that these same principles apply to achieving our common goal – entry to the Kingdom of God. So let us revisit these same principles and see how they would apply to our spiritual lives.

## The Principles In Relation to True Success

**1.) Hard Work** – Some people think that the journey towards God's Kingdom does not require any effort or at the least, only a minimum effort. They think that by grace alone are we saved and once saved, always saved. Nothing can be further from the truth. If we want to enter God's Kingdom, we have to do something. We cannot just dream about it or just talk about it. Paul in his letter to the Philippian church has this to say:

Philippians 2:12 - 13 (NIV) Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." Notice that. "Work out our salvation, with fear and trembling!" Does that sound like it does not require any effort on our part? Hardly. It means we have to exert every effort and do it consistently to

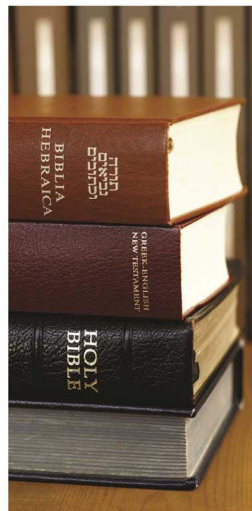
make it into God's kingdom. And we also have to note that God also works in us so we don't wander from His purpose. His good purpose (or goal) is for us to enter His Divine Kingdom. If God works for our salvation, should we not do the same? But let us clarify one thing here though. Our hard work will not earn our salvation for it is made clear in Romans 6:23 (NIV) "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Eternal life in God's Kingdom is a gift of God. By hard work on our part, it just means coming up with our best effort to obey God and all His commands, to overcome ourselves and the temptations that abound around us. The world we live in does not make it easy for us to obey God and all His Laws. There are so many things around us – the glamour and the glitter of the world – can make us lose focus on what is really important. The hard work lies in exerting our will and bodies to obey God, to conform to His will amidst the environment where we live. And to keep us working in the right direction, we have to have the right spiritual knowledge.

**2.) Knowledge** – Just as we need the right knowledge to succeed in this physical lifetime, the more that we need the right kind of knowledge to succeed in entering God's Kingdom. This knowledge is two-fold in nature. We must be definitely anchored in the correct doctrinal knowledge and from this correct doctrinal knowledge we can derive the

right knowledge to live our lives. So, now we have knowledge that is doctrinal in nature and the application of this knowledge to everyday living is what we call today as Christian living. Certainly we need the right knowledge about who God is, His nature, what is His purpose for us, His way of life, among other truths recorded in the Bible. Most certainly we need to know God's commandments that define the way we should live our lives. These are all saving knowledge. And we must equip ourselves with that. The only source of that vital knowledge is none other than the Bible. We read in 2 Timothy 3:16 - 17 (NIV) "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." Notice that. The Bible is inspired of God and is useful for teaching us (that means equipping with us the right spiritual knowledge), rebuking (certainly, if we are not able to apply this knowledge whether by omission or commission, we will get a rebuke from God), correcting (most certainly the Bible can always correct us if we are holding on to wrong doctrines and when we do get corrected we have new additional knowledge) and training (absolutely, if we apply all the things we learn from the Bible, then we are being trained in righteousness). And what is the end goal of all these? As stated in verse 17, so that we may be completely equipped. For what? For every good work. So, here we see the importance

of having the right spiritual knowledge. It supports the first principle.

**3.) Planning** – With regards to this third principle, we can safely say that there is a plan designed by God Himself to ensure our salvation. And our plan should be actually just to follow that plan. We don't have to devise a plan of our own like we would with our personal goals. That plan of salvation has already been laid out by God. We only have to follow that plan. That plan of salvation is outlined in the 7 annual feasts or holy days of God (For more information, you may request for our free booklet\_\_\_\_\_). It is a roadmap for us to follow. It details step by step how we would attain salvation beginning with the sacrifice of Christ, our Passover until the Last Great



Day, where everyone will have the chance to be saved. It is the master plan of salvation for all of mankind. We read in Leviticus 23:1 - 2 (NIV) "The LORD said to Moses, "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'These are my appointed feasts, the appointed feasts of the LORD, which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies.'" The word appointed denotes a fixed time, meaning it has been thought of beforehand by God. In other words, he has planned these Feasts to teach us that He has a plan to help us succeed entering that Kingdom. So every year, as they come, we are supposed to keep them. Why? To remind us of the spiritual plan of God. Each Feast is a step towards

beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise." In this fourth principle, we are actually admonished to fear God if we want to become wise. This principle helps us a lot with the end goal of making it into God's kingdom. If we fear God, we would avoid sin like the plague. Why? Because we know that sin will cut us off, disqualify us from entering God's Kingdom. If we fear God, then a natural and logical consequence of that fear would be obedience to God's commandments. If we follow God's commands, then just as we have read, we will "have good understanding." How important is that to us spiritually? We avoid making

Corinthians 10:5 - 11 (NIV), Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert. Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: "The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry." We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. We should not test the Lord, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes. And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel. These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come." In other words, we should learn from the past experiences of the Israelites. We should avoid these mistakes in our lives so we avoid jeopardizing our chances of making it into the Kingdom of God. Again, it would be very helpful for us if we continue to study the Bible and gain wisdom from the experiences of other people before us, from those who disobeyed and obeyed God. And based on what we learn, we should apply them. If we do, we are exercising wisdom.

**5.) Seek God** – Just as we have seen before how this principle works for us when achieving our personal goals, this same principle works much the same way for us to make it into God's Kingdom.

## Some people don't really learn until they have experienced pain for themselves.

us and ultimately the rest of mankind achieving salvation, entry to God's Kingdom. So in this regard, we plan our physical lives around the weekly and annual Sabbaths. They are non-negotiable. These are times fixed, appointed by God Himself and we should be careful to observe them. There are rich meanings in each of the feasts of God. As we observe them, we imbibe the lessons that can be learned from all of them so we are able to succeed entering God's Kingdom.

**4.) Wisdom** - The Bible says in Psalms 111:10 (NIV) "10The fear of the LORD is the

the mistakes of so many. We don't have to go through the dangerous and painful experiences of sinning. Some people don't really learn until they have experienced pain for themselves. Actually, some people want to go through the experience itself. But that's dangerous and reckless. If we are wise, we would listen to God and avoid learning the hard way. We can learn without going through the actual painful experience. Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, recalls the experiences of the ancient Israelites in 1 Cor 10:1-11. Let us begin reading in verse 5: 1

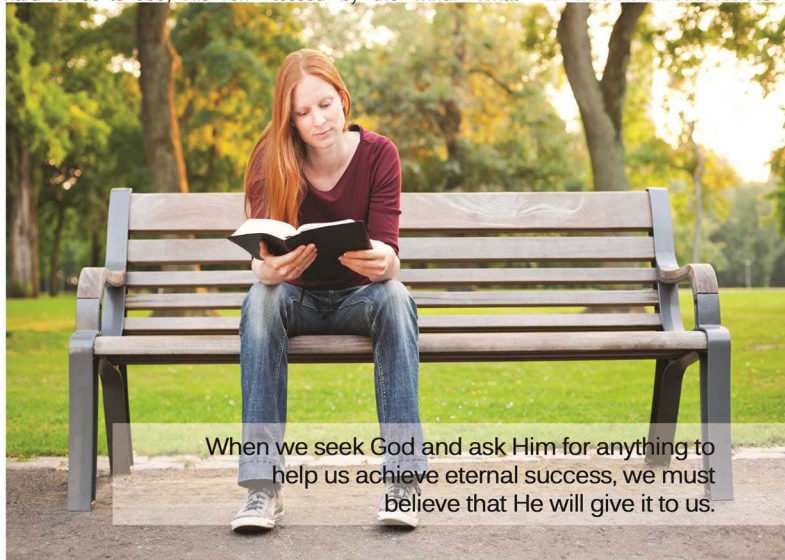
God will make sure that we are equipped for the journey towards His Kingdom. While it is true that it is difficult to overcome, God will grant us that strength of will to do so. Paul takes comfort in this knowledge and wrote in Philippians 4:13 (NIV) "I can do everything through him who gives me strength." Whatever the challenges of life, we can be assured of God's support if we seek Him diligently, if we come to Him on a daily basis. The challenges we meet on this lifetime may affect our resolve to enter God's Kingdom. But if we go to God daily in prayer, then we are assured that we are not alone. Are we faced with circumstances that make it hard for us to obey His Ten

Commandments? Then we should seek God's help so that we can overcome these and obey them. It will take a lot of faith on our part that God will work things out, but we have to believe and act on this faith. Do we think that we are not yet wise? James has this to say: James 1:5 (NIV) "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him." See, God promises to give us the things we need to make it into His Kingdom. All we need to do is ask and believe for that is what is the next verse says: James 1:6 (NIV) "But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind." What

does it say? When we seek God and ask Him for anything to help us achieve eternal success, we must believe that He will give it to us.

### Conclusion

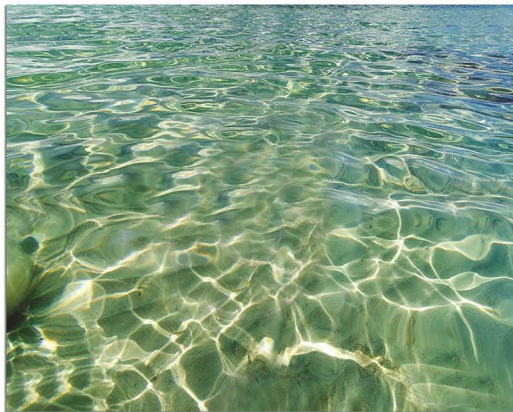
Dear reader, we have enumerated 5 principles that would help us make it into His Kingdom. Hopefully, the three part series has been helpful to all who want to succeed in entering God's Kingdom. God wants each one of us here to succeed, not just in this lifetime but more so in entering His Kingdom. He would love to spend eternity with us, His children. So, hopefully, these principles we have learned together can help us along our journey towards eternal success. **AG**



When we seek God and ask Him for anything to help us achieve eternal success, we must believe that He will give it to us.

# The Pool Bethesda

by Rene D. Corpuz



**P**ool Bethesda was an important landmark during the time of Jesus. Fascinating and intriguing incidents happened within the confines of this pool that will help strengthen our belief in the miraculous power of God. The apostle John spent considerable space recording an incident that happened here in the course of Jesus' ministry.

He wrote: *After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had. Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, "Do you want to be made well?" The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me." Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your bed and walk." And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked. And that day was the*

*Sabbath. The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, "It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed." He answered them, "He who made me well said to me, 'Take up your bed and walk.'" Then they asked him, "Who is the Man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk?'" But the one who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, a multitude being in that place. Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you." The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. (John 5:1-15)*

Pool Bethesda is in itself a testimony, an irrefutable proof that will certainly put to rest the lingering doubts about the existence of God. The pool also served as one of the many places where the presence and power of God was made manifest.

For Israel and the Jews, the pool was a constant reminder that God has not completely abandoned them. With this knowledge, they held on to the promise God made to King David that there will always be a king that will sit on his throne. That's why the Jews, even if they were under Roman rule, were always anticipating for the coming of the Messiah to restore their own kingdom. And for as long as they can feel the presence of God at the Pool Bethesda, the promise of a coming Messiah remained alive in their hearts!

As for the Gentiles, Pool Bethesda serves as proof that the God of Israel is true - He is real; that He is a God who heals - even if it happens sparingly,

and on a particular season only. Thus, many among the gentiles came to believe and worshipped the God of Israel. This account also provides us with very helpful insights of how God and Jesus respond to prayer with regards to healing.

## Lessons To Learn

### 1. *Persistence and Patience.*

When requesting for God's healing, we must be persistent and patient. The man that was healed by the Lord Jesus exhibited these traits. He never lost faith; he never abandoned what he believed in; even though he knew he had a very slim chance of getting to the pool first; yet he kept coming back. Having been there in such a helpless condition for 38 long years, he never gave up hope but instead exercised unbelievable patience and persistence – a feat worthy of emulation for the modern-day Christians. In all those years he took “no” for an answer from God, but remained steadfast in his belief that one day he will be healed. His hope didn't waver – he was always there at Bethesda, and finally got what he waited for.

The first time he came to the pool, he may have only heard incidents of healing. But when he saw for the first time a sick person healed, it lifted his spirits and was encouraged to come back to try his “luck”. This time his faith was no longer based on hearsay, but on evidence—on what he himself witnessed. Those who went to Bethesda, including those who had been healed, knew it was an angel that stirred the water; but they also knew it was by God's power that they were healed.

One of the fascinating

scenarios in this account is the man that was healed did not even know who told him to ‘pick up his bed and walk’. He only knew who He was later when they met again at the temple, and most likely it was through His voice that enabled him to recognize Christ. Of course it's not surprising that he did not see who he was talking to at the pool. His eyes were focused at the pool, and so is everyone else. All of them can't take their eyes off the pool or they will miss the moving of the waters. A split second can spell the difference between taking that first step ahead of everyone else because when the water moves everyone will be rushing towards it. While it's not exactly a “now or never” situation, it is a “now or better luck next time” deal.

repentance. The apostle James made it clear that God “resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble...” (James 4:6).

In this pool many will go home without getting healed. Perhaps frustration, disappointment and envy were felt by some of them. But everyone became a witness of the person who was healed without dipping into the ‘miraculous waters’ of Pool Bethesda. They were witnesses that the God of Israel is real and He heals; though many of them would have to accept that that day was not one of their lucky days. This event gives us a very good perspective of the personality of Jesus, and that of His Father as well, who is also our Father.

Jesus comes, heals then leaves. He heals many on occasion. But in Bethesda,

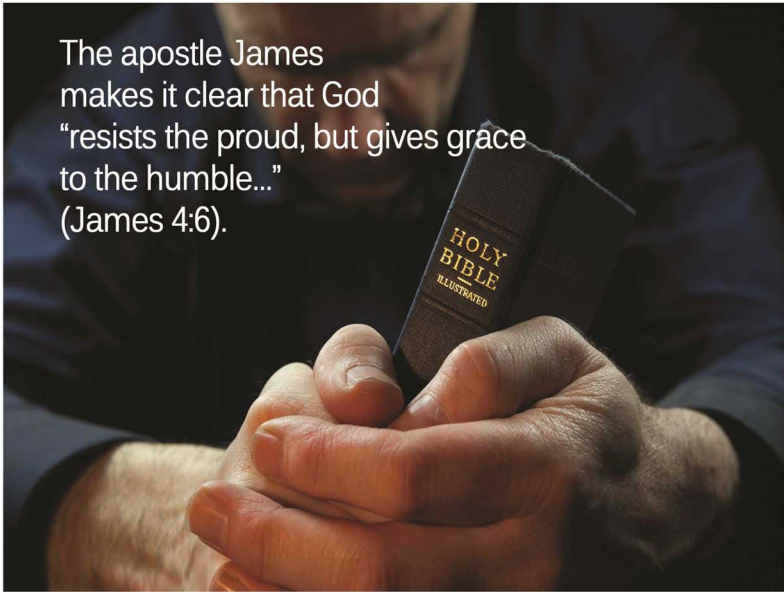
For Israel and the Jews, the pool was a constant reminder that God has not completely abandoned them.

### 2. *Humility and Forgiveness.*

This man never stopped praying for healing and asking for forgiveness. He knew why he was in this predicament, it is the result of what he did 38 years ago. Jesus knew it as well. After all, the man was already in that condition “before” Jesus was born as a human being. And in this encounter Jesus was between 30-32 years old. This incident, Jesus demonstrated kindness and generosity not only to the obedient, but also to those who were at one time disobedient but are now sincerely asking for forgiveness in the spirit of humility and

Jesus healed only one and leaves the rest of the sick still sickly. He could have sent all of them home healed. After all, if healing is based on one's faith, then this man, as well as the rest of those who were waiting in this pool, had faith! While they have never laid eyes on God, and likely never saw the very angel that stirred the water, they believed. They have all seen, on more than one occasion, the blind see, the lame walk, the leper cleansed, the deaf hear, the mute speak. There was actually no need for them to see God; the evidence of His power was right before them through

The apostle James makes it clear that God “resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble...” (James 4:6).



the healed ones that they saw walking, seeing, talking and cleansed. They saw how the impossible became a reality.

They all have faith, but they also understood that in this pool, it's not how strong or how weak one's faith is that mattered. It's all about being the first to step into the pool! The power of God to heal is not limited by the strength or weakness of a person's faith. God has real power, and these people who were always there have seen and witnessed it!

Jesus forgives. He made it clear on several occasions that the act of healing also includes the forgiveness of sins. The general belief of the Jews that sickness comes as a result of sin is

not without basis; and so is the idea that bad things happen because bad things had been committed. It is true in many instances. In the Old Testament, bad things do happen when people do not follow God's laws and instructions. This is embodied in the chapter dealing with "blessings and curses" found in Deuteronomy 28. While we need to learn to distinguish between God's hand and plain random events—we must not dismiss the fact that God interferes in human affairs, especially when it comes to the safety and protection, the discipline and guidance of those who entered into a covenant with Him.

In this particular case, what happened to this man 38 years

ago was the result of sin, and today God will demonstrate to him that he has been completely released and forgiven. It does not mean that God had forgiven him only on the day he was healed, but henceforth he will be freed completely from the burden of conscience he has been carrying for the last 38 years.

#### **Evidence of God**

**1. God is Real!** Healing, whether in times past or in our own time, prove God's existence and power. Whether God heals selectively or everybody, we can take comfort in the fact that He is there, He is real, and He reveals Himself through these miracles - whether through us or through another person.

All throughout the history of Israel, there were few recorded healings. From time to time God used prophets as instruments of healing, but only a few of these were actually recorded in the Bible. That does not mean however that that's all the healing God did. Jesus' example at Bethesda gives us a hint that Jesus has a habit of healing, then walks away without announcement. This tells us that God visits, heals, and then leaves without waiting for a "thank you".

**2. God answers prayers!**  
God shows no favoritism. Jesus did not explain why He chose this particular man. Jesus could have healed the blind, the mute, the deaf, or

any other person in the crowd. But he chose this man, not only to teach him a lesson, but also to teach the Jewish leaders a lesson: on the Sabbath, of sin, and of God. Unfortunately, the Jewish leaders didn't seem to learn the lesson. Their reaction and response were downright denial and outright rejection instead of repentance and appreciation.

God heals, Jesus made that abundantly clear in this example. And God heals irrespective of the reasons behind the person's sickness or infirmity, even if the sickness is the result of sinfulness. God

actually listens to our pleas and considers them, and is kind enough to grant our requests. Scripture after scripture tell us that God has a soft spot for His children in matters of life and death. He responds positively to requests for healing by and for the little ones. Parents can easily understand this; it's natural to respond to the cry of a child. While it took God some time to heal the man at the pool, it is comforting to note that God really does respond – whether now, tomorrow or in the future.

**AG**



## THE CHURCH OF GOD INTERNATIONAL MEETING PLACES

### **Manila**

6th Floor, Peak Sun Building  
Princeton St. [Along Shaw Blvd.]  
Mandaluyong City, Saturdays, 10:00 am

### **Naga**

Villa Caceres Hotel, Naga City  
Saturdays, 10:00 am

### **Alabang**

4Th Floor Metropolis Star Mall, Alabang  
Muntinlupa City, Saturdays, 2:00 pm

### **Negros Occidental**

Brgy. Vito, Sagay City  
Saturdays, 10:00 am

### **Malolos**

Hiyas Convention Center - Governance Bldg.  
Malolos City - Bulacan, Saturdays, 2:00 pm

### **Mindanao**

Alson's Palace, Maranding, Lala  
Lanao del Norte, Saturdays, 10:00am

### **Cebu City**

Rajah Park Hotel  
Fuente Osmeña Circle  
Saturdays, 2:00 pm [Every 2nd Saturday of the Month]

### **Iloilo City**

Iloilo Midtown Hotel  
Yulo Street  
Saturdays, 2:00 pm

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**WHAT IS YOUR  
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**WHAT DOES THE  
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