

PURSUE THE HIGH CALLING

Recently, I went to a fellowship gathering with some of my Christian friends. Most of us are already well established in our professions, as well as being leaders in our local churches. As the night went on, we shared about our family life, our work, and the America's current situation. I felt that there was a sense of insecurity in the room; the recession has caused my friends fear for unemployment; with the unemployment rate reaches over 10% in America, there was a fear that they might not be able to find another job equivalent to their current positions if they become unemployed.

Today we see some unemployed middle aged professionals work at the check out stands in the supermarkets. Engineers are forced to take low pay jobs such as carpet cleaners. One in five U.S. homeowners with mortgages owe more than the value of their houses, with no job security, and no health insurance, our life savings can be gone in a few months of time. The American dreams have leaked out of our hands. How can we find security and assurance in life? How can we get back ourself worth? A casual observer of the fundamental world systems are struck with an impression of general deterioration and decay that appears on a course toward complete breakdown. World economies threaten to collapse, and governments are buried in debt.

My friends were very discouraged as we discussed on purpose of life, and our relationship with Christ. Some of my brethren were so dried up spiritually, while some

were wounded by others in their local congregations, some were disappointed in the operations of their local assemblies, and for some if not because their families have been attending their churches for so many years, they would stop attending. Some of them had actual left their local churches even after ten years of attendance.

In one of the study by Libby Lovelace in 2007, the study showed of all reasons why churchgoers choose to leave their previous church, the top specific reason was because the local congregation did not help the believers to develop spirituality, encompassing 28 percent of non-mover church switchers. Another 20 percent of respondents to the study said they left because they did not feel engaged or involved in significant church work. A common element among church switchers was disenchantment with church members. Eighteen percent of respondents felt that other church members were judgmental of others as a specific reason for switching. Other member-related reasons for switching were members seemed to be hypocritical (15 percent), another reason for switching was local church did not seem to be a place where God was at work (14 percent).

The other day, I receive a message from a pastor; he expresses his thoughts about the conditions of the American churches in general. He believes that some churches are more divided than ever, the divorce rates on Christians are no better even higher than the secular couples. Christian families made education and success idols of the heart, some believers are lusting after pornography; some local congregations religiously partake of the rituals such as media indoctrination; and some local

assemblies' pastors and leaderships worship the mega-church leaders and church growth.

Some of us have become self-seeking, consumer minded Christians, we demand user friendly worship services with prestigious choir, orchestra, band, awesome music, drama and play, while forsake the listening of Word of God, thereby placing the sermon on the secondary list. We are using positive thinking as a form of spiritual formation; we know too well to love self but forgotten to love our neighbors. We love God as long as He answers our prayers in concurrence to our material desires; God has become our instrument for prosperity and happiness. However, we upset and question God's love when God does not grant our wishes. We make no spiritual affect to encounter the Lord with an attitude that God is too abstract and intangible, we often worship God only through our nature of senses. We bond our understanding of God merely in reasoning, natural law and science. We approach the Word of God mix with cultural concepts. We think that somehow the Lord will change our fleshly nature into His divine nature, without the believers seeking to be transforming by the Holy Spirit. No wonder we have such critical problems in our spiritual life. We have lost our deep trust in God's divine plan for our life; we have disconnected ourself to the force of our peace and joy. How real is the Lord Jesus as the Savior in our life? What are our Kingdom values? Are we seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt 6.33)? Is Jesus really the Lord over everything in our lives? Do we love Jesus more than anything on earth? Have we forgotten how to live as born again Christians?

I do not think that God is pleased with some of the situations in our churches today; I am deeply concerned for the continuing of some who are mixing the Word of God with erroneous teaching from the cultural perspective, building their own kingdoms through business world models. There is a deadly narcotic the devil is using as a device. This drug causes people to get addicted on using the ministries to feed their own ambitions and desires. This narcotic is like a poison that tastes well. When one begins to use it, more and more is required until there seems no way out of the addiction. This narcotic might be called “ministry fame”. We must take notice of the warning made by our Lord Jesus,

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’ ” (Mat 7:21-23 ESV)

“I never knew you” has an imply meaning that I never approved of your conduct.¹ Does our Lord approve of our conducts? Are we doing the will of the Father? These are the fundamental questions we must ask ourself. We cannot use the worldly values to determine what is successful in our church ministries, nor should we over concern on what other think of us. When the Roman Emperor Constantine converts to Christianity, he treats the Christian faith with favor, years later the Christianity become the state religion. Thousands of Romans convert to the Faith. Romans build many churches buildings for worship. In the mean time, the church organization

wants to be more acceptable to the Roman society, become a user friendly church, and as a result, they adopt many pagan ideas and images, such as worship the Virgin Mary which is incited by pagan religion, the pagan worship the Greek goddess Artemis is transferred to the worship of Virgin Mary. The church organization seems to be very successful in the eye of the society; its clergies obtain enormous religious power as well as political power. The church organization influences the culture and the education of the whole Europe for over a thousand years; nevertheless it is so corrupted in moral and in doctrines. Is this kind of success we desire for our ministries?

I. THE NEW LIFE

We are buried with Christ by baptism into death; our old sinful life is dead, nevertheless just as Christ rose from the dead, we now can live in the newness of life (Rom 6.4). This New Life is from Jesus, by Jesus, and for the glory of Jesus. This New Life is full of divine power, glory, peace, and joy (Eph 3. 16-20). However, if we do not connect to Jesus, we would be unable to live in this fullness of New Life.

Passion to know Christ is one of the ways that believers can connect to Jesus (Phi.3.10). Paul distinguish spiritual passion is to know Jesus through experience. “This is Paul’s major passion, to get more knowledge of Christ by experience.”² We need to have the passionate drive to know, to experience, and to love Jesus. God loves

us unconditionally and uninterruptedly; in the same aspect, we ought to respond to His love by our longing and passion. Consider the lyrics of the 8th century Irish hymn *Be Thou My Vision*:

“Thou my best Thought, by day or by night, Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light. Be Thou my Wisdom, and Thou my true Word; I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord; Thou my great Father, I Thy true son; Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one.”

This hymn expresses the desire of having God’s hand in the believers’ life and a longing to be in His presence, it is describing the loveliness of God indwell with us, we indwell with Him, and God’s presence becomes our light and wisdom. This kind of spiritual desire should be the attitude of every Christian, as expressed in Psalm 42: 1, 2 “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: When shall I come and appear before God?”³

II. NO DIMENSION

We must acknowledge our insufficient and inadequate ability to comprehend our God. He is the “no dimension” God, yet He creates both material and spiritual dimensions, and He is in all dimensions (1 Ki 8.27). However humans are limited by

our dimensional conceptualization of the universe, matter, time, and science. The Enlightenment philosophy reduces the possibility of subject that does not fit within the observational perceptions of what they identify to be a three-dimensional universe. However, the multidimensional universe that has been revealed in the modern mathematic and physics allows a host of possibilities that the Enlightenment philosophy would rule out. The New York Times explain Albert Einstein's multidimensional universe in this way,

“With those symbols Mr. Einstein was building his theory of relativity. In that baby carriage with his infant son was Einstein's universe-in-the-making, a vast, finite-infinite four-dimensional universe, in which the conventional universe – existing in absolute three-dimensional space and in absolute three-dimensional time of past, present and future – vanished into a mere subjective shadow.”⁴

In God's spiritual dimension(s)/realm(s), the absolute three-dimensional spaces and absolute three-dimensional times are not absolute at all, for this reason the born of the Spirit (regeneration), miracles, wonders, speaking in tongues, prophesying, and operating spiritual gifts which are beyond science and natural law can be explained. In John 3.1-13, our Lord Jesus teaches Nicodemus that a person born of the flesh is flesh, and the person born of the Spirit is spirit, and we must be born of water and the Spirit in order to enter into the kingdom of God. The phrase “enter into” in Greek means to become partaker of; to go in and possess the kingdom of God.⁵ Become partaker of the kingdom of God is not a hope reserved only for the eschatological future. In the Lord's Prayer, the phrase “thy kingdom come” is not in the future tense, nor just a

hope that some days God's kingdom will come. The word "come" in Greek is a primary verb used in the present;⁶ in the Rabbinical writings usually refer to the revealing of the God's kingdom instead of its "coming".⁷ God's kingdom is revealing in part to the believers now, and it will continue to reveal in fullness in the eschatological future. While we are living on earth, we are to participate in the Kingdom now, which means that we have to be born of the Spirit and participating in the supernatural realm(s)/dimension(s) of God while living on earth; let us examine the following Scripture:

"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through the full knowledge of the one who called us by his own glory and excellence." (2Pet 1.3 ISV)

The Apostle Peter proclaims Christians have sufficient resource in the given divine power to live out our life on earth, many of us would interpret divine power as moral virtues given by God in order for us to live in a Christian life, such virtues as love, joy, peace, patient, kindness, meekness, self-control, etc (the fruit of the Spirit). Yet divine power has much more essence than moral virtues, "power" in Greek is *dunamis*, it has a meaning of manifestation of divine power, miracle, as in Matt 11.21.⁸ Jesus is always an intensely human Master wrapped in divine power. The miracles contrast strikingly with the miracles of the apocryphal gospels.⁹ This divine power is involving of His supernatural miracles intervene within the realm of natural law, in the interests of God's redemption plan for the believer. This divine empowerment of the believers while we are living on earth is best example of participating in the Kingdom's power now. From regeneration to living in a Christian

life, Christians are participating in God's supernatural redemption process, without our participation in this process, regeneration will not take place, and we would be unable to live in the born again life. A normal Christian life is to be participating in God's supernatural redemption process now.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;” (2Cor 5.17,18 ESV)

The regeneration does not happen in the absolute three-dimensional natural realm, we can not explain it in the natural law. The new birth happens from “above”, in the spiritual dimension which is beyond the three-dimensional natural realm. Therefore, many people like Nicodemus, through their own conception in the natural realm can not understand the new birth. In John chapter 3, Jesus continues to explain the reason why Nicodemus could not understand His teaching, even though Jesus has used the blowing of the wind (a natural phenomenon) to illustrate His teaching; it is due to Nicodemus' unbelief. Jesus said, “If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?” (Joh 3.12 ESV) We would not be able to understand spiritual phenomena through our reasoning in the absolute three-dimension natural realm. We reason earthly things with natural law, yet we must reason heavenly things with spiritual law. When we believe the Scripture, the Holy Spirit would then lead us into God's spiritual dimension(s); we would experience the Scripture in live actions, to witness God's redeem plan unfolding in human life.

Augustine teaches that time is related to creation, and it has a beginning when

God spoke the universe into existence.¹⁰ God creates times and dimensional spaces, yet He is not bonded by them (1 Ki 8.27 and 2 Ki 20.11). Nevertheless, our reasoning is bonded by times and dimensional spaces, we have limitations in our understanding on God; as a result, experiencing God and His Word through our reasoning alone is insufficient. A person does not become Christian simply by gathering objective knowledge about God. On the contrary, even a person knows all the dogma about God; he may still not recognize God. The person who would know God must surrender to God and let God spiritually and emotionally overwhelms and invades his or her mind, body and soul.¹¹

“While most of man's thoughts, emotions and volitions are self-determined in their origin, being due to the free and natural workings of his own mind and heart and will, yet there are also thoughts, emotions and volitions that are divinely produced. Even a sinner under conviction of sin has thoughts and emotions that are produced by the Holy Spirit. Much more has the believer divinely-produced thoughts and feelings;”¹²

We cannot use our reasoning alone to experience God, nor limited our experience with God through our elementary dimensional conceptualization in the natural law. Our God is Spirit, and we must experience God through the Holy Spirit in the spiritual dimension(s). Church father Irenaeus has taught that the believers must experience the Lord according the Holy Spirit,

“Let us offer the sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of the lips. (Heb 13.15) Now those oblations are not according to the law, the handwriting of which the Lord took away from the midst by canceling it; (Col 2.14) but they are according to the

Spirit, for we must worship God ‘in spirit and in truth.’ (Joh 4:24)”¹³

The Contemporary English Version Bible translated John 4:23, 24 in this way:

“But a time is coming, and it is already here! Even now the true worshipers are being led by the Spirit to worship the Father according to the truth. These are the ones the Father is seeking to worship him. God is Spirit, and those who worship God must be led by the Spirit to worship him according to the truth.”

Since the early 1800’s, artists, writers and thinkers begin to realize that to appreciate literature and arts, we need to go beyond reasoning into transcendent, human beings need to be inspired and be able to express emotional experiences in the heart, inspiration in arts and literatures through feeling and passion rather than through reasoning alone. In the same way, Christians’ experiences with God need to be inspired and led by the Holy Spirit through our feeling and passion, but not just through reasoning in the mind alone.

III. THE UN-DEATH OLD LIFE

We all desire to live in the New Life with passion. However, some of us have too many distractions; we substituted our passion for Christ with passion for producing wealth; we long to get rich so we can satisfy our desires. We look for material

splendors such as magnificent houses, luxurious cars, fad fashion and brilliant jewelries to make us feel beautiful, powerful and successful. Just like the Romans during the 2nd Century BC, although their levels of affluence and education varied, but they crave for self-promotion and display. They desire lavish surroundings in order to match their sense of power and dominance. The example set by the wealthiest and most prestigious aristocratic family have enormous influence on other classes; the market offers standardized “Greek” house and décor plan suite to every pocketbook to imitate the noble families.¹⁴

Many of us are primarily focusing on improving our life. This sound really reasonable, but the focus is still on the material world, pursuit after material happiness in order to make us feel self fulfilling, without really accountable for our selfish living and disobedience toward God. Scripture warns that the pursuit of worldly material would lead us to neglect the values of the kingdom of God.

Likewise some of us desire our children to fulfill our broken dreams; we want our children to be the best by partaking in sports, playing music, and attending top schools and colleges. We have projected our self images into our children; we use up most of our passion, time and energy to compel our children to achieve our dreams.

Let’s take a look at typical prayers of Christians; are we so different to those who pray to idols? Of course we pray to the only true God in Jesus’ name. However, are we not usually asking the same materials as those who pray to idols? We pray to God to help in our works, to provide us with good health, to keep our children safe

from danger, etc. Is it wrong to pray for the material things? Of course not, only if we focus our prayers merely on the materials, and focus mostly on divine provisions in the material world as the indication to the answer to our prayers, then it is wrong. Jesus teaches us to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and then all other things will add to us (Matt.6:33). If our prayers are not first on seeking after Jesus and to do His will, thus is not a homage prayer. Self-seeking prosperity is not the true fulfillment of life. Prayer must first be on the subjects of how to connect to God, how to carry out our callings, and how to give up our lives that Christ could live through us. It must be about being in love with Jesus, pleasing Him, and seeking to do accord to His desires.

If the source of our passion is fame (including fame for the religious works), powers, societies, jobs, positions (including positions in the church organizations), wealth, etc. When those elements pass out, run out and is no more, then what will happen to us? (Ecc.1:2) Many of us go through life never achieving that dream which we are called. The dream of doing the one thing that drives from the deep passion in our souls. Perhaps some of us have already lost our visions and callings.

Unless we realize the essence to live in the passion, we would get bored with our spiritual life. I define passion as an intense emotional force inspired by the Holy Spirit to pursue God's callings and a zeal for spiritual gifts. The phrase "desire spiritual gifts" in I Corinthians 14.1 means to burn with zeal for spiritual gifts, this is passion. Do not put our passion into things that are temporary. Christians should know worldly materials are temporary, ask ourself these questions: can the material world

ever run out? Is it permanent? Without the passion for living and serving, our life would be fruitless. We may have all the worldly possessions, but if we do not know the spiritual meaning and purpose of life, then what is life? (I Cor. 7:33, 34)

The Holy Spirit has inspired our passion to pursue the high callings of God (Phil 3:14). The passion is here, inside, just like our heartbeats. Danish thinker Soren Kierkegaard wrote in his Journal:

“The thing is to understand myself, to see what God really wants me to do; the thing is to find a truth which is true for me, to find the idea for which I can live or die.”

Our callings are essence of who we are. It is the reason we are living on earth, to carry out our callings. Do not let culture, background, wealth, talents or intelligence limit us in pursue the callings of God. We would be amazed how often Christians come to the end of their life and have an empty feeling deep down inside that they have never been able to fill. I am not referring to the emptiness created by lack of money, deficient in power, or lost of love. I am referring to that bareness created by never have the passion to pursue the calling, carry out the dream that can fulfill us.

God’s callings are not exclusives for the ministers; we all are called to serve both the body of Christ as well as our community, God’s callings is not limited to any type of work either; His gifts to Christians are including both spiritual and material abilities. There is no such thing as prestigious job or insignificant work (1Cor 12.14-23). The only question we should ask is that are we functioning within our own callings?

This passion keep us spiritually awake, energizes us, drives us, and makes us so different from the world (John 15:19). This passion inspires us to pursue our callings without incentive, to do something we believe in with all our heart and soul. Our passion to pursue the high callings will influence our children; hence they can be inspired by the Spirit to pursue their own callings.

Christians are not of the world as Christ is not of the world (John 17:16). We cannot be the imitators of Hollywood, nor be the followers of Paris fashion. Our attitudes toward the world should be as strangers, consider the father of faith Abraham, although he is very wealthy, yet he lives as a stranger on earth, the Scripture said,

“By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was waiting for the city with permanent foundations, whose architect and builder is God.” (Heb 11.8,9 ISV)

Christians are the Disciples of Christ, imitating the life style of Jesus. Jesus lives in a very simple life; he never worries for the worldly things. Take a look at John the Baptist and the Apostles; they are all living in a simple life style, they live as strangers on earth; eagerly wait for the Heavenly City. Our home is not of this world, we do not belong here, we belong to the kingdom of God.

God is Spirit, works in the spiritual realm(s); Christians are commanded to live in the New Life, participate in His spiritual realm(s). The filling of the Holy Spirit is a way that our spirits, souls and bodies can experience the reality of this New Life, the

joy that beyond the worldly pleasure, full of the glory of God. It is the divine power of the Holy Spirit empowers us to live in this New Life. Exposing ourself and our family to the dynamic, supernatural power of Holy Spirit would connect us to the spiritual reality. The spiritual self-fulfillment and the excitement of this New Life are here and now for us to experience.

“ But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit.” (2Co 3.18 ASV)

IV. CONNECT TO THE POWER

When we are facing challenge in life, we must learn to let it go, and let the Holy Spirit takes control of our affairs and of our worries, the Holy Spirit would connect us to the supernatural power of God. When we are worrying more often than not we attempt to control the challenge by the worry, the wrong belief is that if we worry enough about the situation, we will be able to figure out a way to prevent something bad from happening. When we fully turn over our worry to the hand of God, trust Jesus would control the situation completely, we would then be in the state faith, we would have the freedom; our soul would feel peaceful and relaxed. When we open to God’s assistance, we can let worry go and connect to power of the Spirit.

Do not allow ourself to indulge in worry; fear controls over our situations

which would have negatively affected on our spiritual as well as our emotion life; we will lose our passion to pursue our calling. We do what we can to take caring of the problem, than let it goes into the hand of the Lord. Trust Jesus loves us, whatever the outcome, it will be for the best of our interest.

“And we know that he works all things together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.” (Rom 8.28 ISV)

When we are called by God to accept Christ to be our personal Savior, He already has an eternal redemption plan for our life, a purpose for us to live, a calling for us to fulfill. The word “good” in Romans 8:28 means useful, pleasant, joyful, excellent and upright. God arranges our circumstances to bring “good” into our life, thus we can completely trust our Lord. Just keep in mind that changes produce opportunities, and challenging times actually create the best opening for God to bring us into His redemption purposes.

Letting go is to give opportunity for the Holy Spirit to work in our life. If we are trying to manage our affair all on our own, worry on every detail in life, fear on the future, we are in fact interfering with the Holy Spirit. We would be unable to experience the divine power which God has bestowed in us if we never let go. Once we experience the support of the Spirit, it will be like a miracle. Let go and let the miracle begin in our life, have faith in God; the Holy Spirit would enable us with divine power to manage our life, and to inspire our passion to pursue our calling.

“For it is God who is producing in you both the desire and the ability to do

what pleases him.” (Php 2.13 ISV)

Thoughts of faith and trust are true thoughts connected to our Savior. Fear thoughts are generated by the liar of the devil and by our own misconception; they have no basis in God’s reality. God’s reality is that we can do all things through the Holy Spirit who empowers us (Php 4:13). Worries are generally thoughts of projected fears of the future, fears of unknown, and fears of not in control. We often believe in these thoughts of worry, we begin to react to them, and then think they are realities. Pessimistic thoughts produce negative feelings such as fear; negative feelings will then produce harmful actions. We can terrify ourself with negative thoughts, but we can counter our negative thoughts by the Word of God, telling our mind, “You are lying; it is not the Kingdom realty.” Our brain need to be trained to think in God’s conceptualization. Through worship, prayer, and mediation in the Word, the Holy Spirit will connect us to the Kingdom conceptions (Joh 16:13).

Choosing to be in the faith and in the Kingdom conceptions are choices, it does not happen automatically. Moment by moment we have to ask our self, is this thought one of faith or one of fear? Kingdom thought, is enlightening, unreserved, and have the effect on our life conceptualization. Fear thought is heavy and destructive; they create tension in our souls. Therefore, we can observe which kind of thoughts we are engaging throughout the day, rather faith or fear. If we identify a fear thought just say to ourself, “This is a liar!”, and switch to a faith thought. Practicing thought switching is that each time we switch from fear to faith; we are actually training our mind to

support God's reality. The more we are able to turn off the negative thought, the more we reinforce the Kingdom thought patterns. By not reinforcing fear and misconceptions in our thought, their strength is lessened.

Fill with the Holy Spirit, become a Kingdom minded people who focused on Jesus with passion, love Him more than our own life, picking up our cross and not be ashamed to bare the marks of loving Jesus. We must recognize that even though we are living in the world, nevertheless we are also living in the spiritual world of God simultaneously. Recognizing we have died with Christ, and now we are living the New Life, participating in the Divine Power, living in the Kingdom's value, seeking the treasure of Heaven, pursuing the calling with passion.

V. GOD IS THE SAME

To connect with God, we must engage in the experience that moves us and our children out of the routines of life. In our fast paced world of business, exciting sports, the massive information and entertainments in the Internet, our daily devotion and church meetings often seems boring. Yet God is not boring! Charismatic, supernatural and powerful are described in the Scripture relevant to God. The church meetings described in the Book of Acts are powerful,

“when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was

shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken wherein they were gathered together; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spake the word of God with boldness” (Act 4.31 ASV). “And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; ----” (Act 5.12 ASV).

Now, ask ourself a few perceptive questions. When did we and our children last experience the magnificent love of the Lord in our prayer and in our worship? When did we last strike in the heart by the revelation in the Scripture? When did we last witness a person accepted the salvation of Christ through the hearing of the Word? When have we seen someone being physically healed by the divine power of God? According to some surveys, 70 to 80 percent of U.S. respondents believe God heals people in answer to prayer, and that in many Latin American, Asian and African countries where Pentecostal growth is occurring most rapidly, as many as 80 percent of first generation Christians attribute their conversions primarily to having received divine healing for themselves or a family member.¹⁵ Do we still doubt that God is healing people today? Are we still rejecting the operation of the spiritual gifts as written in I Corinthians 12 and 14, and in Romans 12?

When we look at the Church history, we will discover that after the Apostle Era (the first century) and the complete of the Cannon (about 400 AD), there are still many well documented physical healings and operations of spiritual gifts in the Church, Augustine (354-430 AD) provides cases of over seventy miracles in and around his church such as a woman is healed of her breast cancer when she made the sign of

Christ on her sore; an old comedian of Curubis is healed of paralysis and hernia at baptism.¹⁶ Gregory the Wonderworker (213-270 AD) bishop of Neo-Caesarea, he becomes a Christian under the influence of Origen. He preaches the gospel on the streets, and he heals a crowd of sick people, soon after he builds a church in that city. Theodore of Sykeon (759-826 AD) is well-known for his miracles of healing, expelling demons, and for inducing repentance of sin. St. Catherine of Siena (1380 AD) is prominent by extraterrestrial visions, consolations, healing power, and bring the dead back to life. J.C. Blumhardt, his healing ministry is from 1829 to 1880, the famous Swiss theologian Barth calls Blumhardt his mentors. People are often healed spontaneously, while listening to his sermons, with no special acts or instructions on Blumhardt's part at all. Sometimes people receive healings while Blumhardt is praying for them after they had come to confess sinning and seeking God for forgiveness. Blumhardt usually find out the healings well after they had happened, and often surprise takes him.¹⁷ Brother Andre (1845-1937) a humble Quebec priest who suffer poor physical health, but over 435 people are cured through his intercession as reported by Lafreniere in 1916, Arthur Saint –Pierre even offers medical certification for some of the cures.¹⁸

The “Didache” is a Church manual of the late first or early second century, a manual of moral instruction and church order. The Didache addresses the issue of local and itinerant prophets; it gives directives for discerning the true from the false prophets. For centuries Christians enjoy reading the Shepherd of Hermas, which is written in

Rome (90–150 AD), possibly in stages. Hermas' own experiences tended toward visions, angelic visitations, and voices from heaven. Polycarp, a younger contemporary of Ignatius, is martyred around the middle of the second century. The account of his death is drawn up almost immediately. It included a vision and a reference to other predictions. The Epistle of Barnabas (early- to mid-second century?) regards the gift of prophecy as a sign of God's presence in the congregation.

Many of today's cessationists rely on Warfield's decision to tie the end of spiritual gifts to the completion of the Canon (with, or without the help of 1 Cor. 13. 8–10) and then just presume that the facts of the Church history will bare them out. Nevertheless the cessationist cannot depend on the Church Fathers or the Church history for support nor for agreement with the proposal that spiritual gifts had ceased after completion of the Bible.¹⁹

Do we still believe that the Book of Acts is only a history book of the early Church? Most of the Evangelical scholars such as Dr. Howard Marshall, Dr. Stanley Toussaint, Dr. Menzies, Dr. Gary McGee and Dr. Max Turner hold the same opinion that the book of Acts is history but it is also intensely theological. Luke is teaching eternal doctrines to the Christians through story telling, his teaching apply to the first century Christians as well as the present day Christians.

The Book of Acts is the doctrines of God reveal through history,

“--- on the contrary, our focus as interpreters must be on the biblical witness. God's word is in history but not of it. The ultimate purpose of Scripture is to draw us into the drama of redemption, into the life and action of the triune God, so that we can

be faithful yet creative actors who glorify God in all that we say and do.”²⁰

“For Luke, the Spirit is God revealing himself-accosting us, surprise us, giving us dreams and revelations, leading us in unexpected directions, manifesting himself in unexpected ways and places, making Christ almost palpably present to us, grasping us with profound and transformational understanding, bringing joy and praise to our lips and hearts, giving special wisdom in testing circumstances, on occasion ‘filling us’ with special prophetic words, and more generally empowering that us to share the good news of our God and of his wondrous deeds accomplished in Christ. That is what Luke means when he talks of Jesus pouring out Joel’s promised eschatological gift of the Spirit of prophecy in Act 2. And he does not think of this gift merely as one for the golden age of the church’s beginnings. For him, as indeed Joel promised, the gift of the Spirit is essentially the Spirit of prophecy and it is for all God’s people. And so, as the ‘children’s children of the first post-Pentecost believers, and those also called by the Lord, it is implicitly for the present-day readers too (cf. Acts 2:38-39). ----- there is little doubt that he walks shoulder to shoulder with his canonical companions, Paul and John.”²¹

Some of us may have misunderstood that verses 9-20 in chapter 16 of Mark are not in the original manuscript. Some Bible translations footnoted that the most reliable earliest manuscripts and ancient witnesses do not have these verses. However, these last 12 verses in Mark are cited (at least in part) by many ancient witnesses, such as Justin (165 AD), Tertullian (220 AD), Hippolytus (235 AD), Ambrose (397 AD) and Augustine (430 AD).²² Dr. Cyrus Scofield comments in the Scofield Bible that these verses are quoted by Irenaeus and Hippolytus in the second or third century.²³ The 3rd century Church Fathers have quoted the entire verse of Mark 16.17 in their ancient

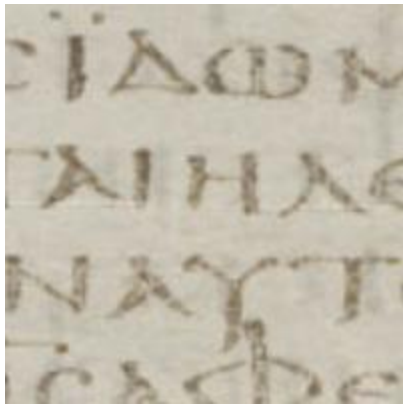
writing (Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. VII , Book VIII, Sec. I. On the Diversity of Spiritual Gifts).

It is correct to say that there are two ancient manuscript copies do not include Mark 16.9-20 (Vatican Codex and Sinaitic Codex), however there is no evidence to support these two manuscript copies are more reliable than other 24,000 partial and complete manuscript copies of the New Testament. We can find about 150,000 variants among all the manuscript copies; nevertheless, 99% of the variants hold virtually no significance. Dr. Steven Cox points out the facts that the last 12 verses of Mark are very possible found in the older manuscripts of Vaticanus Codex and Sinaiticus Codex.

“Vaticanus was copied from an ancestor (i.e. older than Vaticanus) which must have contained 9-20, since space is left for 9-20 to be filled in, and then started to write Luke on the reverse side of the page. This is the only blank column in the whole NT of Vaticanus. Normally books start on the same page, so Mark starts immediately under Matthew, Luke immediately under Mark, and so on. Sinaiticus, was also copied from an ancestor (i.e. older than Sinaiticus) which must have contained 9-20, since the sheet for Mark 14:54 to Luke 1:56 has been replaced with a new copy written on new sheet (a bifolium, a sheet folded in the middle creating four pages). The handwriting of the new page is different from the scribe who wrote the pages either side. This replacement sheet for Mark 14:54 to Luke 1:56 is spaced with larger letters than the surrounding pages, and includes an ornamental arabesque to fill the extra space.”²⁴



Part of Mark Chapter 13



Part of Mark Chapter 16 ²⁵

We can observe by the above images of the Sinaitic Codex, the handwriting in Mark 16 is of a different person. Thus the reliability of the Mark 14:54 to Luke 1:56 in this Sinaitic Codex become very questionable. Under the rule of law, these verses written on a new page inserted into the original codex, with the handwriting of a different person from the scribe who wrote the pages either side is regard as unauthentic document, as a result this inserted page is not admissible as genuine document in a court of law.²⁶

Beside the Vatican Codex and Sinaitic Codex, there is still another valuable 5th century Greek manuscript of the Old and New Testaments, Codex Alexandrinus (the Britannica encyclopedia recognizes it as an importance manuscript which is now preserved in the British Library)²⁷, Mark 16. 9-20 is found in this manuscript copy, and these last 12 verses in Mark also can be found in most other complete manuscript copies Greek uncials (A, C, D, K, X, D, Q, and P) dated among the fifth and ninth centuries, these last 12 verses also contained in later dated Greek minuscule (137, 138, 1110, 1210, 1215, 1216, 1217, 1221, and 1582) and in the majority of Old Latin texts as well as the Coptic versions and other early translations.²⁸

There is no evidence to support those verses 9-20 of chapter 16 of Mark are not in the original manuscript; on the contrary, the evidences support that these last 12 verses of Mark have cited by many early Church Fathers. The 3rd century Church Fathers have quoted Mark 16.17 directly, we can find these verses in many reliable manuscript copies of the New Testament. Throughout Church history, the Church has accepted Mark 16. 9-20 as part of the Canon. For the reasons cited above these 12 verses are part of the Scripture which cannot be deleted or ignore by the present day Christians.

Consequently, the promises made by our Lord Jesus to the believers in Mark 16.17 and 18 that the miracles will accompany those who believe, such as in His name Christians can cast out demons, Christians can lay their hands on the sick, the sick will recover, and Christians can speak in new tongues, these promises absolutely apply to

the present day Christians. Evidently from the very beginning Christians have believed in the miraculous and the power of the Christian faith to work miracles is one factor in the conversion of the Roman Empire. In the years after 500 AD miracles loom more prominently in the writings of educated leaders of the church in the West.²⁹

By His promises, we can connect to our charismatic, supernatural and powerful God; we must engage in the Divine Power moves us out of the limitation of the absolute three-dimension natural realm, to witness the deliverance power of God in action. After all we are commanded to be witnesses for our risen Lord (Acts 1.8), our Lord is alive, and His redemption model has not been changed, Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb 13.8).

VI. CONCLUSION

We now live in the “Beat Generation”, a generation deluded by the promises of the American dreams, loses in direction; desperately search for purpose and meaning of life, a world hungrier for spiritual reality than ever before. People are seeking for much more than they had experienced in the material world. Without any doubt there is an unprecedented movement toward spiritual things. Passion to pursue the high calling is a way to find direction, purpose and meaning of life, passion to pursue is a spiritual drawing to God in a one on one intimate love relationship. Experiencing the

love and presence of God would set our life on fire with meaning and purpose; we then can find self fulfillments in Him (I Cor.1.9).

We must awake with the passion to pursue the high calling, and live our days in the reality of God. We need to work within our callings, work with the passion; we will then find the purpose and meaning of life. There is always joy, satisfaction, fulfillment, and feeling of success when we do something to fulfill our callings.

Endnotes

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- ¹ Albert Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Mat 7.23 (e-Sword)
- ² Robertson Word Pictures, Phi.3.10 (e-Sword)
- ³ Psa 42:1, 2 ASV
- ⁴ The New York Times, Albert Einstein,
http://topics.nytimes.com/topics/reference/timestopics/people/e/albert_einstein/index.html (Nov.6, 2009)
- ⁵ Vincent's Word Studies, Joh 3.5 Enter into, e-Sword, 2009
- ⁶ Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionary, [_l\]big \[c&e-Sword](#), 2009
- ⁷ Sherman Johnson, Exegesis on Matthew 6.10, The Interpreter's Bible
- ⁸ Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, (Clarendon Press. Oxford) 1940
- ⁹ International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Holy Spirit. (e-Sward 2009)
- ¹⁰ Confession, Book XI, Chapter 13
- ¹¹ Tony Campolo, Speaking My Mind, (W. Publishing Group, Nashville, 2004) p.106
- ¹² International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Providence (1) Divine Providence as Related to Willing Wills. (e-Sward 2009)
- ¹³ Irenaeus , Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenaeus, XXXVII, (e-Sward 2009)
- ¹⁴ Paul Zanker, Pompeii Public and Private Life, Translated by D.L. Schneider, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1999) p.136, 141
- ¹⁵ Indiana Professor Awarded \$150,000 Grant to Study Divine Healing, ASSIST News Service, online: <http://www.assistnews.net/Stories/2009/s09040059.htm> (April 9, 2009)
- ¹⁶ Augustine, The City of God, Book XXII. Chapter 8
- ¹⁷ Ronald A.N.Kydd, Healing through the Centuries Models for Understanding, (Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, 1998) p.34-44
- ¹⁸ Ibid. 94
- ¹⁹ Gary Shogren, Christian Prophecy and Canon in the Second Century: A response to B.B.Warfied, Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society Vol.40, No.4 (1997), p.609-626
- ²⁰ Kevin Vanhoozer, Lost in Interpretation? Truth, Scripture, and Hermeneutics, ETS Vol.48, No.1 p.104, 113
- ²¹ Max Turner, Luke and the Spirit, Renewing Theological Interpretation of Biblical Pneumatology, Reading Luke (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2005) p.289
- ²² John William Burgon, The Revision Revised, (Conservative Classics, Paradise, PA, 1883), p. 422-423
- ²³ Cyrus Scofield, Scofield Reference Notes (1917 Edition), Mark 16.9
- ²⁴ Steven Cox, Is Mark 16: 9-20 Original? <http://bibleq.info/answer/629/> (Oct.30, 2009)
- ²⁵ Codex Sinaiticus, Mark 16, Luke 2, <http://www.codexsinaiticus.org/en/> (Nov. 2, 2009)
- ²⁶ Federal Evidence Rule 902.
- ²⁷ Codex Alexandrinus, Britannica online encyclopedia, online: [http://www.Britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/123927/](http://www.Britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/123927/Codex-Alexandrinus) Codex-Alexandrinus (Oct.29, 2009)

²⁸ John William Burgon, *The Revision Revised*, (Conservative Classics, Paradise, PA, 1883), p. 422-423. Dr. Steven Cox also has provided extensive information on the evidences to support that Mark 16.9-20 is in the original text in the bible Q bible questions answered website, <http://bibleq.info/answer/629/> (Oct.30, 2009)

²⁹ Kenneth Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, (Harper & Row, Publishers, San Francisco, 1953) Vol.1, p.369

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