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A Journey of Faith

A woman with her hair in a ponytail, wearing a grey long-sleeved shirt and camouflage pants, stands on a rocky peak. She has her arms raised in a gesture of praise or joy. A large Indian flag (saffron, white, and green) is draped around her, flowing in the wind. The background is a clear blue sky with some light clouds.

Then you will
know the truth,
and the truth
will set you free.
John 8:32

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A Journey of Faith

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Editorial



Rev. Vijayesh Lal

Building a Flourishing Nation: The Vital Role of the Indian Church Amidst Transformation

Amidst India's ongoing transformation, a significant responsibility rests upon the Indian Church to play a pivotal role in fostering justice, well-being, and human flourishing. As the nation grapples with evolving dynamics and debates surrounding democracy, religious freedom, and minority rights, the Church's contributions are more crucial than ever.

India's democratic journey, once a beacon of hope and indeed a 'miracle,' is currently undergoing scrutiny as reputed institutes studying democracy shift their classification from a working and thriving democracy to an "electoral autocracy," 'partially

free,' and a "flawed democracy." The rise of societal polarization and the challenges it poses to unity and harmony are undeniable. This landscape offers the Indian Church an opportunity to stand as a beacon of ethical leadership, promoting values that resonate with justice and inclusivity.

One key factor contributing to these shifts is the dominance of a majoritarian ideology whose exclusionary definition of Indian identity has marginalized religious minorities and promoted policies and actions that undermine the nation's commitment to secularism and pluralism.

The organizations that push this ideology have strategically leveraged media control,

propaganda, and intimidation to further their agenda, culminating in significant influence over Indian society and politics, leading to social and religious polarization like never before. Perhaps the most significant indicator of the success of these organizations and their political arms is the normalization of hatred that is now witnessed on a daily basis in the news and on social media.

As the nation grapples with these changes, the Indian Church finds itself at a critical juncture. Christianity has deep historical roots in India, contributing to its social, cultural, and political tapestry. The Church's efforts in education, healthcare, and social welfare have played pivotal roles in nation-building, enriching the nation's intellectual and cultural heritage.

However, the Church faces formidable challenges. Reports of violence against Christians and religious minorities, along with instances of forced conversions and destruction of religious property, underscore the urgency for action. The Church must acknowledge the

changed political and social context and adapt to ensure that it not only survives and thrives but also meaningfully contributes to nation-building in this new era.

As the Indian Church navigates this changing environment, several avenues emerge for it to actively contribute to the nation's well-being and human flourishing:

- The Church must continue its longstanding commitment to education and healthcare that aligns with the pursuit of societal well-being. By furthering these initiatives despite the opposition it faces and expanding access to quality education and healthcare services, the Church can uplift marginalized communities and contribute to a more equitable society.

- The Church must also continue to focus on grassroots social welfare programs that empower vulnerable populations and can create a lasting impact. Advocating for policies that address poverty, inequality, and social exclusion is a must

if the Church wants to be a catalyst for positive change.

- The Church in India should continue to actively engage in interfaith dialogue, fostering understanding and harmony among diverse religious communities, and at the same time, actively participate in civil society to advocate for just policies.
- Championing the rights of religious minorities, including Christians, is integral to upholding democratic values. The Church can leverage its influence, whatever it has, to ensure that minority voices are heard and protected.
- Another key area where the Indian Church can set an example of ethical leadership is by upholding principles of integrity, accountability, and transparency. This must start from within its own ranks and spread across various spheres of society.

While reflecting on these potential contributions, it is also imperative to address recent

instances where the Indian political landscape intersected with human suffering and societal concerns, such as the distressing events in Manipur and Haryana. In the face of such challenges, the Church's role becomes even more significant – to not only offer solace and support but also to advocate for justice and solutions that promote human flourishing.

As India navigates its path forward, the Indian Church's journey in this new era is fraught with challenges, but it also holds the promise of resilience, adaptation, and meaningful contributions to the nation's future. By recognizing the changes, adapting its strategies, and standing firm in its commitment to democratic values and religious freedom, the Church can play a pivotal role in shaping India's path forward. As India navigates its way through transformation, the Indian Church's response will not only impact its own survival but also contribute to the preservation of democracy, diversity, and harmony in this diverse nation.

Rev. Vijayesh Lal

INDEPENDENCE AND EQUALITY

Rev. Kuruvilla Chandy

Where the mind is without fear
and the head is held high
Where knowledge is free
Where the world has not been
broken up into fragments
By narrow domestic walls
Where words come out from the
depth of truth
Where tireless striving stretches
its arms towards perfection
Where the clear stream of reason
has not lost its way
Into the dreary desert sand of
dead habit
Where the mind is led forward by
thee
Into ever-widening thought and
action
Into that heaven of freedom, my
Father, let my country awake.
So wrote Rabindranath Tagore in
1910.

After gaining independence, is India free? Is there equality, liberty and justice for all? Not for women, children and Dalits.

- 2002 – during the Gujarat riots, Bilkis Bano was gang-raped and her family, including her three-year-old daughter, were murdered. However, even the 11 men who were convicted, were prematurely freed from serving life terms.
- 2012 – the young woman who became known as Nirbhaya, was gang-raped and tortured, resulting in her death. There was an outcry from all over the country and finally, those convicted were hanged in 2020.
- 2018 – there was the case of

the eight-year-old girl who was gang-raped for three days by a gang of young Hindu men who chose her specifically to send a message that would terrorize the Bakherwal – a community of Muslim nomads. While the nation was outraged, some members of the ruling party, some lawyers and the Hindu Ekta Manch rallied around the rapists as if they were crusaders to be heralded for their heinous acts. The raping and murder took place in a temple, as though the little girl was a sacrificial offering to the gods.

- 2023 – there is widespread condemnation for the way in which two women were marched naked and molested by a mob of men before being raped and one of them murdered in Manipur. It has highlighted how women often pay the highest price during conflict. It took this horrific video to get the Prime Minister to break his silence about the violence in Manipur.

Dangerous Countries

The following are the factors that make a country dangerous for women:

- Patriarchal cultural norms that give priority to men over women and boys over girls perpetuating the notion that

women and girls may be deprived or violated without impunity

- Weak legal frameworks that fail to protect women and provide justice for victims of gender-based violence
- Widespread poverty, which can force women into risky situations such as early marriage or prostitution
- Lack of economic opportunities, which can lead to financial dependence on men and increase vulnerability to exploitation
- Inadequate access to education and healthcare, leaving women vulnerable to abuse and preventing them from seeking help
- Political instability, which can lead to an increase in violence and exploitation
- Prevalence of armed conflict, which can result in sexual violence being used as a weapon of war
- Discrimination against marginalised groups, such as ethnic or religious minorities, exacerbating the risks faced by women within these communities
- Limited representation of women in political and decision-making roles, perpetuating inequality
- Systemic corruption that allows perpetrators of gender-

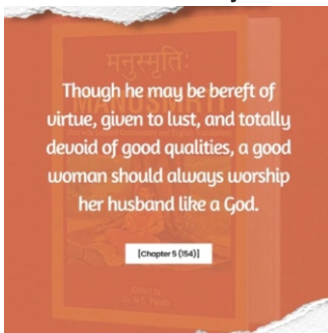
based violence to go unpunished and hinders efforts to improve women's rights.

Clearly, India fails to safeguard women's rights.

Culture of Degrading Women

Those are the political and legal reasons for exploitation and abuse of women and girls. However, Dalit poet Kutti Revathi says that *Manu Smriti* (the Laws of Manu) has contributed to sexism, in how a woman is treated. *Manu Smriti*, she says, has to be understood in the context of years of oppression that women and Dalits have faced. Dalit feminist organisations have advocated that the day when Ambedkar burned the *Manu Smriti* (25 December 1927) should be commemorated as Indian Women's Liberation Day.

Manu Smriti requires a woman to treat her husband as a god, no matter how vile he may be:



Contrast that with how Abigail is acclaimed in Scripture for her wisdom in pacifying David after her husband Nabal had insulted David. Gathering his troops, David set out to avenge himself, but Abigail met him and defused the situation, turning David from his intent. She paid her husband no respect, when she told David, "My lord should not pay attention to this wicked man Nabal. He simply lives up to his name! His name means 'fool,' and he is indeed foolish!" The next day when she told Nabal that she had appeased David, Nabal had a stroke and died some days later. After Nabal's death, touched by the wisdom and courage she had displayed in the volatile situation, David asked her to become his wife and she did readily (1 Samuel 25:23–42).

According to *Manu Smriti*, the position of a woman is that "When young she must obey her father; when married, she must obey her husband; and when her husband is dead, she must obey her son." Curiously, the Chinese also have the rule of the three obedience-s for women: "When young she must obey her father; when married, she must obey her husband; and when her husband is dead, she must obey her son." That a widow is required to obey the son she gave birth to and

raised is the ultimate denial of dignity and self-respect that she can be subjected to.

Biblical Equality

On the other hand, the Old Testament says that if a woman makes a vow and her father (Num. 30:3-5) or her husband (vv.13-14) on hearing it disallows it, only then would the vow stand annulled. At first glance, it may seem that women were not free in Jewish society. In a patriarchal/patrilineal society properties and inheritances belong to males – handed down from fathers to sons. The Old Testament law was therefore to prevent a girl or young woman from making a vow committing what belonged to her father or husband without consideration of the family situation.

That the law was about the protection of properties and inheritances becomes apparent when we study the case of the five daughters of Zelophehad. Their father had died without siring any sons. Since the posterity of a family was linked to ownership of a place in the Promised Land, these women argued that they should be allowed to preserve their father's name by becoming owners of land in his name at par with all the male owners of land. Their plea

was allowed, and it became the law for all Israel, that if a man had no sons, his daughters could own land in his name (27:1-8). Later on, their tribesmen posed the problem that if the daughters of Zelophehad were to marry outside the tribe, the allotment of the tribe would be diminished. So, the law was duly amended that women inheriting their fathers' properties were not to marry outside the tribe (36:1-10).

Societies that allow male dominance – that includes much of the Church – should take the cue from the Lord Jesus. One of the things He emphasised in His teachings was that the way men were conducting themselves in their relationship with women was "not the way it was from the beginning" (Matt. 19:8). Pharisees asked Jesus, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" They were obviously favouring men's right to "use and throw away" women. Jesus answered the question by asserting the created order – that when God created humans, man and woman were created equally in the image of God without any differentiation in status (Gen. 1:27). There was absolutely no hint that women were subordinate.

Another time, a woman was

dragged before Jesus and the Pharisees said that she had been caught in the act of adultery. Unlike stealing and murder, adultery is a sin that requires an accomplice, and yet these men caught only the woman. Jesus doesn't answer them but starts to write on the ground. Preachers have speculated that Jesus wrote down all the other sins that the men were guilty of and that is why they slunk off one by one when He told them that the one without sin should be the first to stone her. I rather think that Jesus wrote the law pertaining to adultery – that the man and the woman were both guilty and to be punished equally. The guilty man was not to be let off just because he was a man. While Jesus Himself was without sin and therefore eligible to inflict punishment, He forgave the woman. Whereas the men had excused the misconduct of their comrade, Jesus gave her justice by pardoning her (Jn. 8:1-11).

Saluted Women

It is significant that in the human ancestry of our Lord, women figure in importance:

- Tamar, who wrested her rights from her father-in-law Jacob. He tried to cheat her of those rights, and she even took recourse to immorality to secure her rights (Matt. 1:3

with Gen.38:11-30).

- Rahab, a prostitute who bravely sheltered Israelite spies was valued for the service she rendered in preventing their capture (Matt. 1:5 with Josh. 2:1-21; 6:22-25).
- Ruth left her own homeland and kinfolk to devotedly serve her mother-in-law (Matt. 1:5 with Ruth 1:16-18). Ruth's case is significant at this time when violence is done to women just because they belong to another tribe. An important man in the community of her mother-in-law made sure that the foreigner Ruth was protected and not subjected to any molestation (Ruth 2:8-16).
- Bathsheba was exploited by King David before he honoured her by marrying her (Matt. 1:6).
- Mary was "found to be with child" before her marriage (v.18)

There were many more women in the lineage, but Scripture highlights the five women that had question marks against them. At one stroke, by being recognised as part of the Lord's ancestral background, all the question marks were wiped out. Their independence and their equality in the world of powerful

men stand out. They were and are iconic. And the way men of Bible times treated them is an exemplar of how women are to be treated today. They are not to be denied equality, liberty and justice. Women are in the image of God, as much as men. No less.

When the Holy Spirit came upon the Gentile Cornelius and his household, Peter's response was, "How can we deny them baptism?" He was asking how humans could deny the inclusion of those that the Holy Spirit had recognised and endowed (Acts 10:47).

In a similar way, at Creation, men and women were made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). At

Pentecost, the Spirit came on sons and daughters, men and women equally (Acts 2:17-18). Dare we say that women are not equal to men? Can mortals contradict what the Lord God has done?



Rev. Kuruvilla Chandy
is a freelance preacher and writer. He can be reached at: reverendkuru@aol.com

Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses.

Acts 13:38-39



Truly Free!

Rev. Dr. David Mende

Introduction

This month, we will celebrate the 76th Independence Day of our great nation. I'm blessed to be an Indian. One of the things that I love about our country is that we have diverse languages, cultures, and languages, but we are one nation. I was exposed to different languages and cultures when I first went to Southern Asia Bible College, Bangalore in 2004 to do my Master of Divinity program. India is truly a diverse nation. Though Christians are persecuted in our nation, we still praise God for giving us the freedom to practice and propagate our faith.

But it's possible to enjoy political freedom and still be in spiritual bondage. Unfortunately, many

people are under spiritual bondage today. Probably, some of you are in some bondage today. In this article, let's see how we can be set free. John 8:31-36 speak of the true freedom we have in Christ. In this passage, Jesus says that those who practice sin become slaves to sin, but by abiding in Christ's word, we can experience freedom. John 8:31-36 teaches us a couple of valuable lessons about spiritual freedom. Let's open up the text and see what we can learn.

1. Those who practice sin are slaves to sin (John 8:33-35).

In this passage, Jesus is speaking to the Jews who believed in him (cf. v. 30). In verse 32, when Jesus spoke about the

truth setting them free, the Jews objected to his statement. The Jews answered Jesus, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?" (v. 33). In those days, the upper-class people looked down upon slaves and they could never think of themselves as slaves. Thus, the Jews retorted, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone." The fact is that the Jews were slaves under the Egyptians, Babylonians, Persians, and Greeks, and during Jesus' time, they were ruled by the Romans. Still, Jews considered themselves free because they believed that ultimately God himself was their King.

Also, since Moses' Law explicitly says that Jews cannot be made slaves, the Jews considered that freedom is their birthright because they are Abraham's children (cf. Lev. 25:39-42). The Jews had so much spiritual pride that they didn't acknowledge their need. Even in Mark 2:17, we see that the Jews think that they are whole and don't need a physician. Scholars say that in verse 33, the Jews were probably talking about

spiritual and inward freedom. So, the Jews think they are spiritually free because of their privileged inheritance. They were basically deceiving themselves by thinking that they are free.

When I speak to some so-called "born Christians" about salvation they retort that their grandfather was a bishop and great grandfather was a reverend and so on. Even non-Christians are offended when we say that all humans are sinners. They think that only rapists and murderers are sinners. But they don't realize that since they don't have Christ in their lives, they are slaves to sin. In John 8:34, we read that Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin." Jesus says "Truly, truly" which suggests that he is about to make an emphatic declaration. The word "practices" is in the present continuous tense. So, Jesus is not talking about an occasional lapse, but a continuous practice of sin. A person who practices sin becomes its slave (cf. Rom. 6:12-13, 16-17).

In Romans 6:16, apostle Paul writes, "Do you not know that if you present yourselves to

anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?" Without Christ's liberating work, we repeatedly fall into sin and become slaves to sin. The more we sin, the more we are alienated from God. Inevitably, we can't escape the clutches of sin. Some people come to a stage where they don't necessarily want to sin, but they can't stand the temptations anymore and thus yield to sin. A person who rebels against God thinks, "I am doing what I want to do." But he doesn't realize that he is doing what sin and Satan want him to do. A person who practices sin is in bondage. He is not free. A person who is in bondage to sin loves to indulge in that sin, yet he hates it and is ashamed of his sin. Sin is addictive.

I came across this saying a few years ago, "Habits that begin as cobwebs sometimes end as cables." How true! The more we sin, the more difficult it is to break from the bondage of sin. As someone said, "Sin will take you farther than you intended to go; keep you longer than you planned to stay; and cost you

more than you wanted to pay." When we are in the bondage of sin, we must first admit that we need help from God. Only then can we get out of our bondages. Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5:3). Only when we recognize our spiritual poverty can we receive grace and mercy from God.

Instead of desiring evil things, we need to desire God and the things of God (cf. 1 Peter 2:1-3). You can never overcome evil desires by constantly rebuking them. You need to replace those evil desires by desiring God. In Psalm 63:5-7, the psalmist expresses his longing for God. He writes, "My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips, when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy."

In verse 35, Jesus says, "The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever." Hired slaves don't remain in the house forever. At any time, they can be dismissed or sold by the owner. In a sense,

that's the position of the Jews (cf. Mt. 3:9; 8:11-12; Mk 12:9). Though the Jews thought they were sons (children of Abraham), many of them were slaves to sin. And the Jews were rejecting God's mercy by rejecting Christ. Here, the Greek word for "son" (*huios*) is consistently used by John to refer to Christ. So, the Son, that is, Christ remains (*meno*) forever. Those who practice sin are slaves to sin.

But the good news is that since Christ is free from sin, he can offer us freedom from sin.

2. By abiding in Christ's word, we can experience true freedom (John 8:31-32, 36).

To the Jews who believed in Jesus, he said, "So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (vv. 31-32). Jesus is speaking these words in the context of the Feast of Tabernacles (Jn 7:2ff). This festival commemorated Israel's journey in the wilderness after they were freed from slavery in Egypt. So, it's appropriate that Jesus spoke of spiritual freedom in this context.

Now throughout John's Gospel, we read about people who have fickle faith in Christ (cf. 2:23-25; 6:60). Jesus is telling the people who believed in him that initial trust is not good enough. He tells them that they must abide in his word. Some people have a superficial faith in Christ. In the Parable of the Sower, our Lord says, "And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away" (Lk. 8:13). That's why the writer to the Hebrews warns the Jewish Christians not to commit the sin of apostasy (Heb. 6:4-8; 10:26-31). I've seen this happen with so many people. Some people get baptized. They even join the Ministry Team and serve the Lord in some capacity. But for several reasons, they forsake the Lord.

Here the Greek word for "abide" (*meno*) is the same word that is used in 15:4-7, 9-10. The phrase "abide in my word" is translated as "hold to my teaching" in NIV. To abide in Jesus' word means to continue believing in Christ's words and to obey his words. Christ's words come from the Father and are thus God's words.

In one sense, Christ's words include all of the Bible. It's not enough to know the teachings of Christ. We must persevere in it. A true believer perseveres in obeying Christ's teachings (cf. 2 Jn 9; cf. Heb. 3:14; Jas 2:14-26; Rev. 2:26). We must abide in Christ's word. In other words, we must make our home in Christ's teachings. God's Word must saturate our minds and hearts. Our thinking, our attitude, and our actions must be shaped by God's Word. Then, we will be free from sin. In Psalm 119:9, the psalmist writes, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word."

Persevering in Christ's teachings has two consequences: (1) It proves that we are true disciples, not fickle followers of Christ, and (2) We will know the truth which liberates us. Here, Jesus is talking about spiritual freedom. That's clear when you read verse 34. The Jews believed that studying the Torah gave them the power to defeat sin in their lives and gave them spiritual freedom (cf. Ps. 119:45). Here, Jesus says that the only way to know the truth is to believe his words and obey them. The Gospel of John reveals that the Law points to Christ

(5:39, 46), that Christ is full of grace and truth (1:14), and that he himself is the truth (14:6). So, liberating truth is found in Christ alone. The prayer of our ancestors, "*asa to m sadgamaya*" (from falsehood lead me to truth) is ultimately fulfilled in Christ alone.

In John 8:36, Jesus declares, "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." Jesus alone can liberate us from sin (Rom. 6:17-18; 8:2; cf. Jn 3:18; 5:24). If the Son sets us free, we will be free. In order to continue experiencing that freedom, we must continue to abide in Christ's teachings. In Galatians 5:1, apostle Paul writes, "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." In Jesus' time, slaves could not set themselves free. Only a free person could set them free. If we don't go to the Son, there's no way we can be free from sin. Religion can't set us free from our sins. Only Christ can set us free!

This doesn't mean that we will be free of sin. But we will not have the constant inclination to sin. We will seek to please God rather than our sinful desires. It's only

the Son who gives us the privilege to be God's sons and daughters (cf. v. 35). True freedom is not about doing whatever we want, but it's about doing what we ought to do. All over the world, millions of people can testify that Christ has set them free. As we sing, "There is power in the name of Jesus to break every chain!" Submission to Christ brings true freedom! Jesus sets us free from sexual sin, anger, pride, selfishness, jealousy, and every sin! By abiding in Christ's word, we can experience true freedom.

Conclusion

What is the principal idea of this article? **Continually abide in Christ's teachings to experience true freedom.**

It is not God's will that we remain slaves to sin. If we are in sin, let's admit that we are in bondage to sin and cry out to Jesus. He will set us free from every bondage! Even as we celebrate our nation's Independence Day this month, let's make a commitment to continually obey God's word and then we will continually experience the true freedom that Christ gives.



Rev. Dr. David Mende

serves as the Lead Pastor at El-Shaddai Assembly of God Church, Hyderabad (elshaddaiag.in). He also serves as an adjunct faculty member at Southern Asia Bible College (SABC) in Bangalore, Hyderabad Institute of Theology and Apologetics (HITHA) in Hyderabad, and SUM Bible College & Theological Seminary in California, USA. He has authored eight books, including The Dangers of the Health and Wealth Gospel.

He is married to Sis. Susan Mende, who is also actively serving the Lord. They are blessed with a daughter, Karis Ruth. Dr. Mende can be reached at +91 9848004094 and davemende@gmail.com.



Celebration in the Midst of Lament

Dr. Shantanu Dutta

India's Independence Day, celebrated with fervour on the 15th of August each year, is a momentous occasion that marks the nation's liberation from colonial rule. However, the significance of this day is not limited to the mere commemoration of the past; it also serves as a poignant reminder of the challenges and lamentable issues that persist in contemporary India. As the tricolour unfurls, and the nation joins hands in jubilation, it is essential to reflect upon the current realities that demand attention, introspection, and unity. The unending violence in Manipur is on all our minds. In such a landscape of lament, it

becomes imperative for us to use this occasion to reflect on how to celebrate and worship in an atmosphere of grief and pain.

One way to celebrate India's Independence Day in a time such as this is by acknowledging the sacrifices made by the freedom fighters and envisioning their dreams for a just and inclusive nation. Their struggles can inspire disillusioned people to work towards building a society free from discrimination and inequality. The celebration can be transformed into a platform for encouraging civic engagement and advocating for positive change. Over 16 lakh Indians have renounced their Indian

citizenship since 2011 including 2,25,620 people last year, the highest during the period, while the lowest of 85,256 was in 2020, according to government data. The year-wise number of Indians who renounced their citizenship was provided by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, in response to a question in the Rajya Sabha. Clearly, many who can afford it don't find much to celebrate in India.

Simultaneously, celebrating Independence Day during a time of lament should encourage open discussions on the nation's many divisive issues. It is crucial to foster an environment where people can express diverse opinions without fear of retribution, enabling society to progress towards inclusivity and understanding. This is the spirit of democracy that the freedom fighters envisioned for the country.

While occasions bring people together, they should not overshadow the realities faced by marginalized communities. On this day, we must also pay tribute

to those who continue to suffer from various forms of discrimination and violence. It is an opportunity to pledge support to the marginalized and work towards creating a more equitable society.

Lament worship is what comes to mind. Lamenting and celebrating at the same time may seem paradoxical, but it is possible and even essential in certain situations. The Bible offers profound insights into how these seemingly contradictory emotions can coexist harmoniously within the human experience. The scriptures present a rich tapestry of narratives, psalms, and teachings that exemplify the biblical approach to reconciling celebration and grief. Worship after all is necessarily an act of celebrating God's greatness and goodness in whatever circumstances we find ourselves in. It is woven intricately into the fabric of sacred scriptures. Throughout the Bible, we find numerous examples of lamentations, where individuals and communities express their

heartfelt sorrows, pain, and struggles before God. These passages offer profound insights into how we can celebrate in worship even at a time of extreme sorrow.

Roughly one-third of the Psalms are categorized as Psalms of Lament. These heartfelt expressions of sorrow and pain demonstrate the authenticity of human emotions and the willingness to lay bare one's soul before the Almighty. The Psalmist boldly cries out to God, questioning, complaining, and seeking solace in the midst of affliction. In the book of Job, we encounter a profound example of lament worship. Job, a righteous man, faces unimaginable suffering and loss. Despite his trials, Job does not hesitate to express his grief and frustration before God. His honest lamentation shows that bringing our doubts and anguish to God is acceptable, even when we don't understand the reasons behind our suffering. Job's story also reminds us that God is sovereign and compassionate, even in the midst of our most profound pain.

The prophet Jeremiah is often referred to as the "Weeping Prophet" because of the Book of Lamentations attributed to him. This book captures the intense grief of the prophet over the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Through this lament, we learn that even in times of deep anguish and despair, God remains steadfast in His love and mercy. Lamentations also emphasize the importance of corporate lament, as the prophet grieves alongside the people, fostering a sense of community in shared sorrow.

In the New Testament, we see Jesus' own lament in the Garden of Gethsemane before His crucifixion. He pours out His soul to God, expressing His anguish and desire for an alternative path. Jesus' lament serves as a model for believers to come to God in times of distress and surrender to His divine will, even in the midst of great suffering.

Lament worship is not solely about expressing sorrow; it is also an act of hope and trust in God's faithfulness. Many biblical

laments conclude with expressions of confidence in God's deliverance and salvation. This dynamic interaction between lament and hope shows that, ultimately, worship of any kind draws us closer to God and strengthens our faith.

This August, we may not find much to celebrate in the manner we usually express celebration. However, the scriptures teach us that lament is an authentic and vital expression of our emotions before God, fostering honesty, community, and deeper faith. Through lament worship, we find comfort, hope, and the

assurance that God hears our cries and remains present in our pain. This Independence Day perhaps that is what we are called to do.



Dr. Shantanu Dutta
is a part of Interserve (India) and the Theological Research and Communications Institute and can be contacted at shantanud@gmail.com

For the creation was subjected to frustration,
not by its own choice, but by the will of
the one who subjected it, in hope
that the creation itself will be liberated from
its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom
and glory of the children of God.

Romans 8:20-21



Euphemistic Europe Mongering on Manipur

Dr. Babu John Vettamala

The special Plenary Session of the European parliament held on the 14th of July aired the dissatisfaction of six major political parties in Europe over the persecution that happen in the State of Manipur in India. This session has much uniqueness if we clearly examine the expressed vocabulary and the implied body language of each speaker.

First of all, we did not hear the absolute contempt of any European nation on the particular Christian persecution in Manipur. To do that they must have at least some elements of Christian

ethics left somewhere at least in the recess of their moral pricks. It is too much to expect such a response from nations that are falling fast into paganism. Let us not fly our kites so high.

Secondly, nobody made even the slightest attempt to identify or address the source from where such misanthropic activities originated. The reason is simple: there is a faith system hiding itself under the guise of a religion which to the credulous Europeans is immensely mystic. Their human gods, female goddesses and meditation gurus are great spiritual heroes in the

Western world. Without them acting as the ideological backbone of such atrocities, persecutions against Christians would be impossible in India.

And thirdly, there are perpetrators of these evil in India who are not people operating in clandestinely, but rather flying around the world offering peace and tranquillity to the emerging world. The doors of the West are wide open for them with red carpet reception. Their platitudes on human rights and democracy are well received with loud applauses by the uncanny West who do not understand the truth that the eyes of these gurus are emasculated to see the reality of Christian persecutions in their own country though their hearts are enlightened on everything else in the world.

While innocent young girls are gang-raped and paraded naked in public, and that too under broad day light, the leader of the nation is prating on his nation's age old civilizations and cultural high grounds on platforms offered in the West. If at all political/governmental powers

and religious powers are assimilated in one person, that person in no time becomes the epitome of evil. But the mindset of the West is too imbecilic to recognize it.

Other than commercial interests do the European countries hold any human right values? If they do, how can they embrace perpetrators of evil whose pagan beliefs ride rough shod on the human rights of innocent, defenceless, unprotected minorities on the basis of religious faith?

Language fails to describe the reality of situations in Manipur. The European parliament was held to address this problem. And then, did they address it? Have they devised any action plan to confront it? Is there any precaution given to their counterparts in India? Not even God Himself would know the answer to these questions.

Being too polished is the hallmark of what is now called the Western culture. So, they cut without wounding, strike without hurting, and attack without

inflicting any pain. Thus, the euphemistic Europe mongers on Manipur.



Dr. Babu John Vettamala,
specialised in Biblical

Psychology, Management, Law, English literature, Western history and philosophy is presently teaching the Bible and ancient Hebrew. He did M.A, Ph.d, English language and literature. He retired from prolonged professional life- Pastor, Teacher, Speaker, Columnist, and author. He Lives in the U.K with family for the last 25 years.

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies
in your minds because of your evil behavior.
But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical
body through death to present you holy in his sight,
without blemish and free from accusation—
if you continue in your faith, established and firm,
and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel.
This is the gospel that you heard and that has been
proclaimed to every creature under heaven,
and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

Colossians 1:21-23

Exploration of FAITH in Christian Life

Mrs. Sabreena Benjamin

Faith Pleases God

The three words St. Paul led by the holy spirit writes in 1 Corinthians 13:13 “so now faith, hope, and love abide these three and the greatest is love.” The word faith is the celebration of victory. The word faith produces joy unspeakable. It produces a blessed life. St. John writes in 1 John 5: 4 “for whatsoever is born of God overcomes the world and this is the victory that overcometh the world even our faith.” Faith gives you victory in your personal life, spiritual life and professional life. There is no subject in the bible as exciting as faith, because without faith it is impossible to

please God. Everything that God offers in the bible comes on the wings of faith. Faith honors God and God honors faith. Faith is present tense. Faith is of the heart and not head. Faith is cooperating with God. Faith is active tense. Acting on God's words brings results and the best definition we could find in the scripture is from Hebrew: 11:1-6 “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for the evidence not seen...but without faith it is impossible to please God for he who comes to God must believe that he is and he is the rewarder of those who diligently seek him.” Going to God without faith is like going to the mall without money.

Faith is not an emotion of feeling it is a substance. If you walk in a hospital room and cry for an hour nothing will improve, but when you speak God's word and stand on His promises, God will surely work in a miraculous way. We walk by faith and not by sight. If you will never believe it, you will never achieve it, because the bible says with God nothing is impossible. Once you believe the scripture you have crossed the line walking from natural to super natural. God's provision is in his promises. There are three thousand promises in the Bible not one of them will work until you have faith to receive it.

Great Faith

The first kind of faith mentioned in the bible is great faith. Matthew: 8:5-10, it's a story of a centurion who came to Jesus and said "Lord! my servant lays at home paralyzed and suffering terribly." Jesus said "I will go and heal him" and the centurion said "no Lord I have power over hundred Roman soldiers and I recognize you have authority over heaven and earth. If you will

just say the word my servant will be healed," and Jesus said "I have not seen such great faith in all Israel and that too came from a Roman soldier." When you have Great faith, it is aggressive and determined,

Great faith, says Jesus, has authority over sickness and disease. Jesus has authority over death, hell and grave. He has authority over winds and waves. He has authority over demon spirits and He has authority over fears and doubts which haunt you and me and the bible says, he has given us the authority to trample over serpents and scorpions, so why not use that authority by faith.

When we talk about faith, the first person which comes to our mind is Abraham, he was called the father of faith. Why? because his word and action were aligned with the word of God. He was a person just like you and me, had ups and downs in his life. He never attended any bible seminar on faith, didn't go to theological college, wasn't born in a so-called Christian family but it was

his decision to walk with God by faith.

Natural Faith

The second kind of faith is natural faith, when you are travelling in an aeroplane, you have faith that the pilot and his crew are competent to take you to the desired destination. That's natural faith, without even knowing the mental state of the pilot. When we vote for our country, we have faith that India is in secure hands and we will have freedom of speech and religion.

- We have faith in our doctor
- We have faith in our Lawyer
- We have faith in our Banker
- We have faith in our insurance company

Then why not have faith in God, who has never failed us. Faith is the victory that overcomes every barrier you have faced. By faith, Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, that's natural faith, (Hebrew:11:24-26). 1Chronicle 4:9-10 says Jabez called upon the God of Israel saying, "Oh that you would bless

me and enlarge my border or my territory or my business and that your hand might be with me and that you would keep me from harm." God answered his prayer and he was blessed with spiritual, professional, and emotional blessing.

Mustard Seed-Faith

In Mathew 17:20, Jesus said "if you have faith as a mustard seed you would say to the mountains move and nothing will be impossible for you." When you pray the sinner's prayer it's an act of faith. In Judges chapter 6, we see Gideon had a mustard seed faith. From a state of fear, weakness and insecurity, Gideon emerged as Israel's hero filled with God's presence and his passion for deliverance, he won over Midianite army. Rehab by faith hid the spices that she and her household may be saved, by mustard seed faith, the widow of Zarephath fed Elijah when she herself didn't have food to eat and God honored her faith. Even though there was famine in the land, she had her three-timemeal.

Measure of Faith

Romans 12:3, “for I say through the Grace given to me to everyone who is among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to everyone a measure of faith.” Shortly when you come to Christ, the prince of darkness will come to you and whisper in your ears, you don't have faith. It's a lie. God has given you a measure of faith. That is why Bible commands us to read the God's Word. By reading and listening to God's Word we increase our faith, because scripture says in Romans: 10:17 “faith comes by hearing and hearing the word of God.” The will of God and the Word of God is always in agreement because they are one and the same. The question is how much do we read the bible that determines the quality and quantity of our faith. Peter in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost spoke about the scriptural truth as he quoted Joel and David and testified about what he had seen and heard from Jesus Christ and by his

preaching about three thousand souls were added to them, Acts 2: 41.

Faithless Faith

In John: 20:27 Jesus said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” Faithless people first see it then believe, faithful people first believe then see. People who say that seeing is believing, are ruled by the flesh and they never experienced the power of God. People drive thousands of miles to see a miracle when God is waiting to do a miracle in your local church or in your prayer altar that's your home. “If we are faithless, he remains faithful for he cannot deny himself” (2 Timothy 2:13). The first people who failed this test were Adam and Eve, because of their faithlessness they destroyed their close relationship they had with God.

Visible Faith

In Luke: 5:20, And when he

[Jesus] saw their faith, he said, "Man, your sins are forgiven you." What was the incident? When Jesus was teaching and doing healing ministry, people from every town of Galilee, Judea and Jerusalem came to hear him and four men brought their friend from roof top who was paralyzed. These friends had similar faith, love and hope for their paralytic friend, and when Jesus saw their faith, He was moved. Because of their faith, the man's sins were forgiven, and he was completely healed. God can see your faith, He can see what we do, where were you last night, he knows what we think because the bible says as a man thinketh so. Faith is the victory that overcomes the world. The just shall live by faith everyday of your life is a faith opportunity.

Little Faith

In Matthew 6:30 Jesus said, "But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?" Today, people are more worried as to which restaurant is good or which

delivery service can deliver in the shortest time. Always remember that God is our Father and He is our provider, our healer, our defender, our rock, our fortress, our shield and buckler.

- We should not fear the sickness because Lord is our physician.
- We should not fear poverty because the Lord is our provider.
- We should not fear not our enemies because Lord is our shield and fortress.

Have you realized that most of the things we worry about don't even happen, so cast all your care upon him. Daniel's faith in God is the best example. The question is why faith is important, and why to have faith in God. Even today, it is not easy to live a life pleasing to the Lord, with so many challenges around us. In 1 Peter 1:7, Peter writes, that our faith in God is "more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire." It is important to note that:

1-Our faith in Christ is imperishable

- 2- Our faith in Christ is uncorrupted
- 3- Our faith in Christ is valuable.
- 4- Our faith in Christ is eternal.

Word of God. Let us surrender our will and desires in the hands of God and He will do great things in our lives.

As we grow in faith, we also grow in the knowledge and deeper understanding of Christ. Faith begins where the will of God is known, feed your faith by reading the word of God, exercise your faith by your actions. Your boldness in your faith will open doors of opportunities for you. We need to trust the Lord with all our heart and lean not on your own understanding, in all our ways acknowledge him and he shall direct your path. God has given us all the promises what we need for our every circumstances so let us use our faith to receive these promises. When we feel low or troubled or have fear and anxiety, we should meditate upon the



Mrs. Sabreena Benjamin
holds diploma in Theology from Life Christian University, Florida and actively is involved in Christian mission as Vice-President, WFCS at Epiphany Church CNI, Gurugram. She is the member of the CNI Synod Council, Member of the Executive Committee, Evangelical and Stewardship Committee of Delhi Diocese, CNI.

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free
Luke 4:18



FREEDOM: LOST & FOUND

Mr. Hansraj Jain

Did you say, "**Tough luck**"?

So, you don't mind being held captive in your'chain', do you?

What am I talking about?

Freedom, of course.

"For freedom you were set free".

Woah! Who said that?

Paul said that. Paul, having been set free from himself, said to his friends in Galatia, and I quote: *"It is for freedom that [Jesus] Christ has set you free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be [chained] burdened again by a yoke of slavery."* (Galatians 5:1).

Freedom is relational, Both in nature and in its content.

Freedom is multifaceted too, - in content and expression.

Nelson Mandela's freedom, M K Gandhi's freedom, 1948 - Israel's freedom; These had one factor in common: they were political in content and expression.

There are other exposes of freedom too.

There is the *freedom to be ourselves (one of the great enslavers today!);* freedom to choose right from wrong (*fear of failure, rejection and poor self-worth and absence of confidence in one's capacity and capabilities*); freedom to

associate and select the company one would like to keep (*chained by a spirit of rebellion, defiance, and need to prove ones' self etc. etc.*).

Every format of freedom comes with its unique structure and content on display. For example, Freedom of Expression in written form, spoken media, electronic and digital media. Freedom of Choice as in: profession we will spend our lifetime chasing; relationship we will develop or reject; country, city and houses we will make our home in (even if temporary!); Religion and Philosophy we will take on board; Marriage partner, children (to have or not to have), elderly parents and their responsibility, etcetera.

Of course, all choices have consequences. Those consequences could be positive or negative. Whichever the form, outcomes are permanently anchored within relationships - organic or inorganic.

U.S. Supreme Court justice, Oliver Wendell Homes Jr., described freedom (was it political or religious?) as ***"Your right to swing your arms ends just where the other man's nose begins."*** *It's all about the*

balance between individual liberty and the greater good (of every citizen).

So, the concept and content of freedom is very significant. Not surprisingly, freedom is always a relationally driven perspective. However, ***Freedom 2023***, unlike its universality and all encapsulating character, has narrowed its definition and content by getting the freedom to be measured by the interest of individuals, making personal more important, subjective and biased.

Despite such a radical shift in the definition of freedom, true freedom, by and large, is both – individual and social. It embodies and incorporates the individual and the mutual. It holds fast to the interdependent world view. Such a paradigm of freedom operates both ways: *"my freedom to swing my arm ends where your nose begins."* *Freedom is a responsible choice-making and demonstrating honour for others as expected of ourselves.* (*Leviticus 19:18b; Matthew 22:39; 19:19, Romans 13:9*)

It is this freedom that Jesus Christ dispenses that is radical and transformative. No, this freedom that Jesus Christ dishes

out to all who come to him is more than transformative. It is resurrective, as in being created anew.

No, no, no! This stuff is **NOT** a great philosophical mumbo jumbo.

"**Prove it**," you say.

Well....

The year was 1994.

Beginning from mid-1994 to mid-1995, my wife and I spent the year in the U.K. One of the privileged events to which we were both invited was a face-to-face meeting with a fantastic human being. That's how we both felt.

In more explicit gender terms, the person was a male, a non-practising homosexual. He had, like us, chosen to follow Jesus Christ as a follower. But there was something unique and special about this person. His uniqueness lay in the fact that He had walked out of what appears to many as impregnable prison of emotional bondage. No steel bars were visible around him. His cell in which he was confined was made from "The 'Emotional Steel'.

As he unpacked his life experience for us, he confessed, *"My imprisonment was my choice. Undiscerningly, I accepted the false narrative dished out, which said that attraction to same-sex persons is more than a platonic friendship. It was Love. And that such an attraction could only be defined as a sexual attraction. So, without giving it a second thought, I took to it and surrendered myself to its enslaving power. I was emotionally compromised. I sold myself to that lie. The power of that lie has been so potent that it changed my entire personhood and worldview. Every dynamic of human relationships began to be dominated by the thought of eros."*

"For over 30 years now", he continued, "I have lived as a practising homosexual. I now realise just how anti-God I was to think I was a good Christian too. The holy character of God was suppressed by the notion that God is Love and that it was natural to love another person of the same sex, for God is the author and creator of Love."

Another deception I bought into was the idea of being a good human being. I harmed no one. I lived an exclusive life with my

partner. Initially, I felt fulfilled. But then, something within me began to gnaw at me. It took me several years and ruthless honesty with myself to even begin to deal with my falsehood-powered lifestyle. It was the life, work and message of Saint John's portrayal of Jesus that began to get through to me. It took several months before I came to the point of realisation that only Jesus could release me from my imprisonment. John's Gospel presents many individuals whom Jesus set free from their personal incarceration. Initially, I was shocked to receive the offer of freedom from my secret, emotional imprisonment from Jesus. With much trepidation, doubt, and uncertainty about the trustworthiness of the offer, I asked Jesus to intervene and set me free."

"I have to confess to you that, unfortunately, I kept failing in dealing with attraction to other men. Each time I failed, I felt condemned. I would tell myself that there was really no getting away from this life of mine. Each time I would convince myself that I could not, and would not, ever be free. Even Jesus could not help."

"Again, that was a lie and lies

piled up. These lies threatened to drown me. And to be honest, they almost did. In this low state, I discovered my Lord's largeness of heart. I received mercy, forgiveness and a deep sense of my worth that surpassed every condemnation and rejection. I was loved just as I had become. I return, I committed to living this life loving my God. I vowed that nothing I do, and would be, shall shame my God or disgrace His holiness. It would be wrong of me to say that I no longer face temptation. That would be a lie."

"So, how do I deal with temptations now?"

"I joined hands with St Paul and took on as my guiding principle for the remainder of my life. "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God;" (Galatians 2:20,21a)

"I have been set free. Truly free!"

Since that vow and the newfound freedom, our friend has lived a transparent life. When questioned, he openly admits to having been a practising

homosexual. But he quickly adds a rejoinder saying, *"Now each day, under the grace of my Saviour Jesus Christ, I live as a non-practising homosexual celibate. For me, my new life of freedom is non-negotiable at all costs."*

True freedom is not the absence of prison or temptation. Nor is it being cuffless or without a chain to hold us a prisoner because we can easily wear invisible cuffs. The truth is: *True freedom is so much more.*

True freedom sets one free to begin afresh and to live responsibly. See, when Jesus, the freedom Provider, asked the woman condemned and sentenced to death, *"Didn't anyone condemn [stone] you?" and hearing "No, no one, Lord!"* He set the condemned free, saying, *"I, too, do not condemn you. Go, sin no more!"* [Paraphrased: John 8:11].

For freedom, we are set free. [We weren't created to be a prisoner nor to live as a prisoner in the first place.]

So, the offer to begin as a fresh creation is an offer with a chance to live responsibly. The invite calls us to remember that shaming

ourselves is to shame the One who set us free and to live as a freshly created being. (2 Corinthians 5:17-18)

Freedom is never self-contained. It always reciprocates. One expression of gratitude birthed by freedom is to share our freedom by *loving our neighbour as we are loved - prejudice free from race, colour, language, caste, faith confession and everything else.* Our Christ-gifted freedom supersedes it all.

True freedom of Love is expressed in its power of inclusion and not expulsion.

Come **INDIA**, let us celebrate this, our True Freedom!



Mr. Hansraj Jain
Managing Director, Family, Marriage & Human Relationships, INHERITORS.



VITAL LESSONS FROM THAT VIRAL VIDEO FROM MANIPUR

Rev. Dr. Duke Jeyaraj

The Viral Video from Manipur featuring two Kuki-Zo women being paraded naked almost brought India and the world to a standstill during July 2023. The BBC describes the video this way: *A video of the incident, which took place on 4 May, 2023, went viral on 19 July, 2023 and caused global outrage... According to the complaint, the (women) survivors, 21 and 42 years old, were travelling in a group of five which included an older woman and two men - the father and the brother of the young woman... The attack on the women took place in the early days of the conflict when they were trying to escape after their village was attacked and burnt down by "a mob of about 800 to 1,000 men, many of them armed". In their complaint, they*

said they were rescued by the police but were "snatched by the violent mob" and forced to strip. The complaint said that the men were killed and the 21-year-old "was brutally gang-raped in broad daylight". The third woman, though not seen in the video, had also been forced to strip, it added. The disturbing footage, showing the women weeping, wincing in pain and begging their attackers to show some mercy, was widely shared on social media on 19 July 2023.

Barkha Dutt, a respected senior journalist, made these comments about this video, after having it seen herself. She made the following comments via her YouTube channel: *What those three women have gone through is unspeakable horror. The FIR*

(filed by the village chief) says one of the women who was forced to strip was 21-years old. She was brutally gang-raped in front of the witnesses. Further in blood-curdling detail, the young brother of the 21-year-old woman who was being raped, tried to defend his sister's modesty and life, but he was murdered by the members of the mob on the spot. The brother who was killed as he tried to defend his 21-year-old sister, was 19 years old. It is difficult to report some stories and this is one of them.

An observer who hailed from Manipur whom Barkha calls Gladly, says this (in the same video): "What more can I say, Barkha? If I have to put myself in their place, I will put death over surviving. In the video that is circulated, everything is exposed. Not even a part of their body is blurred. It is shameful to show this even to male lawyer. We have to find female lawyers to do it." In response to this, Barkha Dutt says this: "I have seen a lot in life as a journalist. But this breaks my heart. As a woman it does!"

The husband of the one of the women said that the mob also set fire to the village church (in another another video as he

spoke to Barkha Dutt).

The Quint Youtube channel put out a video on this viral video. This video specifically mentions that the men touched the private parts of the women publicly even as they dragged them towards a paddy field where one of them was allegedly raped.

This viral video can be the starting point of a Gospel Sharing session – An EVANGELIZATION Session. The murdered 19-year-old brother associated with the Manipur reminds me of the Ultimate Elder Brother, even Jesus (Heb. 2:11) who died on the Cross for each one of our sins (Gal. 2:20). Can this video be a bridge for us to share the Gospel? It sure can be!

This video can also be the start of a SEXUAL ETHICS Discussion with modern youth who grapple with issues such as pornography, sexual touching, etc. The repeated references to nakedness in Leviticus 18 as one read in the essentially literal English versions of the Bible like the NKJV and ESV drives home this message: a woman nakedness belongs to the eyes of her husband alone; the nakedness of a husband belongs

to the eyes of the wife alone. We may never strip a woman naked and parade her naked like the villains of this viral video did. But if we are secretly watching porn, that is a sin we must repent of. In the New Testament, we see a demonized man naked (Luke 8:27). When we expose ourselves to porn-consumption or porn-production – the world of nakedness exposure outside the boundaries of marriage – we, I believe, welcome the work of the Devil in our lives. That's dangerous! We need deliverance which Jesus alone can give!

The groping – sexual touching – done on the women in the Manipur viral video brings to my mind the sins of Oholah and Oholibah in Ezekiel 23. They gave consent to men who were not their husbands to fondle their breasts (v. 3, 23) and God called that prostitution (read the full chapter). This chapter is talking about two places. It is not talking about two literal women. However, this relevant-for-this-generation sexual ethical message remains: it displeases God when we grope women, fondle women who are not your spouses; it is wrong to do this even with their consent. The story found in Genesis 26 tells us that

even Pagan king instinctively knew it was wrong to fondle any woman. That pagan king knew from his conscience that one cannot call someone "sister" and fondle that same person! Fondling, sexual touch, intercourse without resultant intercourse, is also reserved for those married.

At least one of the women in the Manipur Viral Video was allegedly raped. This reminds me of the fact that the Lord we worship never forces anyone to do anything. The Gospel of John reports in chapter 6: *After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" (John 6:66,67).* A man of God put it brilliantly when he said that while we can sure choose what we want to do, we cannot, however, choose the consequences of those choices. Rejecting Christ, who does not ever force himself on us, using our freewill puts us on a sure-fire path to eternal hell. God will not force any of us to quit any of our pet sins! If we are stubborn in the sins of idolatry, lesbianism and homosexuality, the Bible says God can choose to 'give us up' rather than force us or twist our

arm to follow his lead (Romans 1:24,26,28). And when God gives us up, only eternal damnation awaits us! So, now, even now, when we have the time, let us choose to follow Christ, turning from sin!

Yes, the Manipur Viral Video discussion can be a launchpad for us to call people for a DECISION, a CHOICE when it comes to eternity matters.

The Manipur Viral Video also brings to the fore the sad and focussed destruction of a physical building of the local church by anti-Christian forces. Some 250 churches were supposedly destroyed in the first 36 hours of violence, according to reports from the ground. Having a physical building to gather for prayer, study of the Bible, is surely CONVENIENT. But this is not at all, COMPULSORY! They were more concerned about WIDOWS in the Church (Acts 6:1-4) rather than WINDOWS in the Church! What the Apostles called "building" was not a building made of brick and mortar but a building which meant people who needed to be built spiritually with prayer and Word-feeding (I Cor. 3:9). The early church largely met at homes

(Acts 2:46), in any readily available space (see Acts 19:9 – lecture halls; see Acts 21:5 – beach). A careful reading of the New Testament tells us this (Col. 4:15; Rom. 16:5). Raising up a church building is definitely not a sin. But waiting to meet as a church, only if there is an "own building" is built and is made available is a sin! Even if all our church buildings are destroyed by anti-Christian forces (God forbid), we must continue to meet in available homes, available spaces and continue to fulfil the plan of God as the body of Christ without relenting!



Rev. Dr. Duke Jeyaraj
is the founder of Grabbing the Google Generation from Gehenna Mission. His latest adventure for God is running a Kahoot Bible Quiz which is nationally attended with players playing from their home and learning God's Word between questions. Learn more by simply YouTubing 'Duke Jeyaraj Kahoot'.

Forgiveness is The Biggest Gift

Emeritus Prof. Henry Shepherd

Former Chaplain

Sam Higginbottom University of Agri. Tech. & Sciences, Prayagraj

**If a man sins against another man,
God may mediate for him. But if a man sins against the lord,
who will intercede for him?**

1Sam 2:25

The first and foremost prerequisite

The issue of sin and its forgiveness are vital elements of Christian faith. There are more than one hundred and forty mentions of forgive, forgiveness, forgiven etc in the Old and the New Testament. The dictionary defines 'to forgive' as: To stop being angry towards somebody for something that he/she has done wrong. However, it means more and little different when this word is used in the Scriptures. But forgiveness by God is related with sin and its wages (death), when God forgives the penitent sinner he forgives in toto, and also forgets forgiven sins forever. In the same way humans are commanded to forgive each other

the same day, before sunset. God forgives when a sinner truly repents. Jesus exhorts, "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar, first go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift" (Mt 5:23-24). Jesus acts as a mediator between God and men. He got us reconciled with God the Father. Also, he has given us the ministry of reconciliation and also committed to us the message of reconciliations (2Cor 5:18-19). Human's anger usually leads to sin and violence, therefore Jesus admonishes man to shun anger, and not to give devil a foothold. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him

out to be a liar and his word had no place in our lives (1Jn 1:9).

The Lord has warned his followers, "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." (Mk 11:25). This is a necessary condition to receive forgiveness but not sufficient. Also, in Lord's prayer we repeat the line daily – "Forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors". Thus, we acknowledge and confess our commitment in this matter. But, the fact of life is: Since we love our dear ones and forgive them for committing mistake, repeatedly, but often start hating others for one mistake. If we ponder upon the subject further, we come to the conclusion that to forgive and to forget is in our own interest. Constant anger, grudges or brooding not only distorts rightful thinking but disturbs peace of mind, and adversely affects spiritual and physical health. There should be no associated condition attached with forgiveness in inter-personal relations. Jesus said, "If your brother sins against you seven

times a day and seven times comes back to you says, 'I repent', forgive him" (Lk 17:4). Hearing this, Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister?" He answered, "I tell you not seven times but seventy seven times" (Mt 18:21-22). To forgive others is mandatory. God expects us to keep on forgiving the offenders regardless of degree of offense and its frequency. If one finds it unreasonable, he/she should remember how many times God has forgiven every one of us. God forgave Israelites rebellion umpteen times. It is possible to forgive only when person is humble, compassionate and loves his brothers, just as Christ forgave (Ep 4:33, Lk 6:37, Col 3:13). From the cross he prayed for the hooligans, "Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." When a believer says, selfless prayer for sick or disabled person God forgives his sins and heals. Jesus used to tell persons whom he healed. – "Your sins are forgiven or go and sin no more". Though Jews were offended to hear this, for Jesus said it purposely so that they might know that God has given this authority to his Son (Mt 9:6).

The root cause of God forgiving our sins is Love

Forgiveness of sins for us was under God's plan from the time the first sin was committed (Gen 3:15), God gave his begotten Son to die a substitutive death for the sinners of the world. And now whoever believes in the Son is given eternal life. The Father and the son did it out of his agape-love for us. The intensity and depth of God's sin is immeasurable and beyond human perception. Also, God given forgiveness is complete (Jr 33:8) and an act of mercy, and permanent, provided the forgiven sinner remains faithful thereafter. Psalmist testifies, "He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases... As far as the east is from the west, so far he removed our transgressions from us" (Ps 103:3, 12), and remembers them no more (Heb 10:17). God being merciful, gracious, compassionate, and loving, he does not stay angry forever. Those who receive forgiveness are blessed and rejoice in him. The Psalmist says, "If you O Lord kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared" (Ps 130:3-4), the Word

tells us that man cannot work for forgiveness of his sins, for his righteous acts are like filthy rags before God. So, it is by grace through faith we are saved, and he covers our sins forever. Also, those who love others, forgive easily.

The forgiveness is only through his Son who has Said – "I am the Way the Truth and the Life; one can reach God only through Jesus Christ, who died for our sins in our place, to give us eternal life. He proclaimed peace and forgiveness of sin (Ac 13:38). Therefore, now the forgiveness is preached all over the world in Jesus' name as Good News. Salvation is found in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved (Ac 4:12). In Jesus, we have redemption through his blood. The law requires that everything be cleansed with blood and without shedding of the blood there is no forgiveness (Heb 9:22). So, sinless Jesus shed his own blood because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (Heb 10:3-4). Now, he who calls on the name of Jesus is saved. And if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will

forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1Jn 1:9).

Essential steps to receive forgiveness from God

Faith in the name of Jesus Christ is the first, foremost and essential step that ultimately brings forth forgiveness of sins from God. The justification of forgiveness of our sins is substitutive death of Jesus for the sins of the world to deliver us from eternal punishment. The word of God says, whoever believes in him is not condemned but whoever does not believe stands condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son (Jn 3:18). Also, without faith it is impossible to please God. The Gospel is being preached and the listeners are to believe in the virgin birth, death on the cross, resurrection on the third day, ascension to heaven, second coming and judgement of the world. The word of God says, 'How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach

unless they are sent? (Rom 10:14-15). Therefore, disciples were sent by the Lord to preach saying, "Go and make disciples of all nations, and baptize them who believe in the name of the father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Mt 28: 19-20). Everyone who trusts in Christ Jesus will never be put to shame. So, we are expected to harden our hearts to receive the word of God, as and when it comes and knocks at the door of your heart.

The one who believes, remembers the sins he has committed against the Lord, who loves him, so confession and repentance is natural as well as mandatory, for without repentance there is no forgiveness of sins. Israel rebelled against God time and again and they were punished every time, but when they truly repented, God forgave them and restored (Jdg 10:10, 15-16), John the Baptist preached the baptism of repentance. Then Jesus began to preach, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near". After him, Peter preached the Good News and invited them to repent, and those who believed were

baptized as the Lord had commanded, for the forgiveness of sins (Ac2:26-39). So, as of now, this is an ongoing process, and known as 'grace period'. But after rapture, the grace of God may not be available indefinitely.

Thus, the Gospel is being preached all over the world and people are accepting Christ as their Saviour and Lord. The Gospel has power to open the eyes of blind and ears of deaf. The moment penitent sinners are forgiven, they get freed from the bondage of sin, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Also, they receive the gift of the promised Holy Spirit. They come to the light from darkness by faith in Jesus (Ac 26:18); If we walk in the light, the blood of Jesus purifies us from all sins (1Jn 1:7). God commands all people everywhere, to repent for he has set a day of judgement. Apostle John also says: "My dear children, I write this to you as that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the father in our defense – Jesus Christ, the righteous one. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sin, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world (1Jn 2:1-2).

The next step is obedience to God after becoming the child of God. Now, he lives a new life in Christ, as Christ lives in him. Alike Jesus, we have to obey God upto end of our life on earth. Jesus obeyed God suffered and died by accepting Father's will and said, "Not my will but thy will be done". And for this, he made himself nothing took very nature of a servant, humbled himself and died on the cross. Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name above every name. Obedience is reflection of our love for God. Also, we must obey God above earthly authorities. Peter and other apostles look the stand boldly when they were told by Jews not to preach in the name of Jesus (Ac4:19, 5:29). Therefore, to obey is better than sacrifice and this is love for God that we obey his commands, diligently.

All sins are forgivable, but one.

The chance of redemption may be bleak for specific sinners compared to common men. Because those who harden their hearts and do not become like little children they will not enter the kingdom of heaven, as Jesus

has warned (Mt 18:2-5). Also, the Lord said, "Whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my father in heaven (Mt 10:33). Then, he told about rich of the world," I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of the needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom God" (Mt 19:23-24). The problem with them is basic; they refuse to repent and do not stop loving the worldly pleasures and sinful life, which they enjoy at the strength of their wealth. Treacherous Judas, instead of repenting for his conduct and seeking forgiveness he chose to commit suicide. For such back sliders, the Scripture says, " It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gifts, who have shared the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the word of God and powers of the coming age, if they fall away to be brought back to repentance" (Heb 6:4-6). Yet, Jesus said that a few things may be impossible for men but for God everything is possible. If such people choose to repent at any stage of their life forgiveness is possible.

However, Jesus has said explicitly that these is a sin for which there is no forgiveness i.e., blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Mk 3:28-29). Let us remember what happened to Ananias and his wife Saphira, and why they both died instant death (Act 5:1-11). If one who refuses to believe the word of God, it amounts to saying that the witness of the Holy Spirit about Jesus is a lie (Lk12:9). Thus, the forgiveness of God may be conditional, but conditions are not hard, and his commands are not burdensome. The invitation of God is for everyone: whosoever believes will receive eternal life if he remains faithful up to the end.



Emeritus Prof. Henry Shepherd is former Chaplain and Pro Vice-Chancellor of Sam Higginbottom University of Agriculture, Technology & Science, Prayagraj.

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Intercessory Prayer Points



August 2023

1 TUESDAY Thank God for the new month. Pray that many works may be accomplished during the month and God may use you as His instrument.

2 WEDNESDAY Pray for all the Life members and individual members of EFI. Thank God for their support in the ministry of EFI. Pray that they may be blessed by God in all the things that they do.

3 THURSDAY Continue to pray for the ministry of North-East Centre for Training and Research (NECTAR), Shillong, Meghalaya. Pray that they would train many leaders who would bring change into people's lives.

4 FRIDAY Pray for a team of Bible Teachers who are working to develop and design fresh materials for Christian Education of the Evangelical Fellowship of India (CEEFI). Pray that God would enable and help them and use the works of their hands to make Christian education meaningful yet more interesting than before.

5 SATURDAY Continue to pray for the Internally Displaced People all

over the country due to Manipur violence. Pray that God would bring healing to them in all areas of their lives.

6 SUNDAY Ask God for the boldness and courage to share the Gospel with your friends as you celebrate Friendship Day today. Pray for your friends so that they may have eternal life in Christ Jesus.

7 MONDAY Continue to pray for the EFI Punjab Mobile Bible Trainings scheduled for this month. Pray for the Holy Spirit empowerment and guidance for the teachers and those who are learning.

8 TUESDAY Pray for Missionary Upholders Trust at Tamil Nadu. MUT was established to gain deeper understanding of the difficulties faced by the missionaries mentally, emotionally, and physically. Pray that they would lighten the burden of missionaries as they walk alongside them.

9 WEDNESDAY Pray for the 69th EFI Annual Convention and the North India Urban Transformation

Conference of EFI NCUT in New Delhi from 4th – 7th September 2023 at Don Bosco, Sukhdev Vihar, New Delhi that the Lord would bless it abundantly.

10 THURSDAY Pray for Jesus Calls ministry in Chennai. Jesus Calls is a ministry dedicated to prayer for the broken-hearted people irrespective of caste, creed, and religion. Pray that God would raise many prayer warriors who would intercede for the needs of the people.

11 FRIDAY Thank God for the AIM magazine writers who are investing their time and energy every month. Pray for them that their services to the Lord would bring change and growth in the body of Christ. Pray for some who are struggling with health issues that God would bring healing and restoration.

12 SATURDAY Pray for inner strength for the women of India. Pray that they would know their rights and worth in Christ. Pray for equality in every field.

13 SUNDAY Pray for the teaching and learning of God's Word in your church. Pray that the Holy Spirit may teach the audience and many lives may be impacted. Pray that God may remove Biblical illiteracy.

14 MONDAY Pray for Union Biblical Seminary that the Lord would continue to use it to train and equip many young leaders for the

extension of His kingdom.

15 TUESDAY Indian Independence Day. Thank God for the freedom that we enjoy in our country. Pray for freedom for every citizen in every aspect of their lives. Pray for the people to experience true freedom that God offers through Christ Jesus, our Lord.

16 WEDNESDAY Continue to pray for our nation persistently. Pray that all in leadership position would be a faithful and caring guardian of the constitution as well the people.

17 THURSDAY Continue to pray for the finances of EFI. Pray that the Lord would bless and continue to use it as His instrument for change and growth for the Church in India.

18 FRIDAY Pray for the political leaders of our country. Pray that they may be able to pursue and accomplish goals that would bring growth to the country and peace with neighbouring countries.

19 SATURDAY World Humanitarian Day. Praise God for the compassion and bravery of humanitarian workers in India and around the world. Let us also pray for international cooperation to meet the needs of humanitarian work around the world.

20 SUNDAY Let us pray for the Senior Citizens in our country. Pray for accessible and affordable medical facilities. Pray for safety,

protection and lots of love and healthy environment for them. Pray also for those who care for them.

21 MONDAY Pray for the staff of EFI in different parts of India. Pray for God's anointing upon them so that they may effectively serve Him. Pray for the ministry of EFI and the financial needs so that the God would accomplish His plans and purposes through EFI.

22 TUESDAY Pray for children from broken homes that they would find security in Christ. Pray that Jesus would meet their emotional and physical needs, heal them, and bring them to complete restoration.

23 WEDNESDAY Pray for the Churches that God would enable them to overcome any challenge and bear bountiful fruits. Pray for God's help as leaders strategically carry out their plans to extend God's kingdom.

24 THURSDAY Pray for the ministry of CASA-India at New Delhi. Church's Auxiliary for Social Action is a national development and humanitarian organization set up in 1947. Pray for Spirit-led decisions and actions to be made for the benefit of many people.

25 FRIDAY Pray for His continued provision and protection. Pray also that you will be dependent on God and not be self-sufficient.

26 SATURDAY Amidst our struggles and problems, let us pray for His peace to prevail in our lives. Pray that God will give us a persevering heart and strength as we face our problems.

27 SUNDAY Pray that the Churches would worship today with gratitude for the freedom of religion that we enjoy in our country.

28 MONDAY Pray for the Holy Spirit's protection, comfort, and empowerment for those persecuted because of their faith in Christ. Pray that they may come out victorious and gain strength from God as they walk their faith journey.

29 TUESDAY Pray for our neighbouring country Sri Lanka. Pray that God would restore the nation in all aspects. Pray that God would strengthen the Church and use it as His agent in this time of crisis.

30 WEDNESDAY Pray for Dooars Evangelical Bethel Church Fellowship, Jalpaiguri, West Bengal. Pray for effective witnessing to reach the unreached people and planting house churches in the interior parts of the Himalayan region including Madesh and Tarai belt.

31 THURSDAY We thank God for His presence, guidance, and protection to each one of us. Thank Him for the new month.



69th EFI ANNUAL CONVENTION

AND

EFI's NATIONAL CENTER FOR
URBAN TRANSFORMATION'S

NORTH ZONE URBAN TRANSFORMATION CONFERENCE

4th – 7th SEPTEMBER, 2023
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**Theme: “Seeking the Peace and Prosperity of the City and Nation”
(Jeremiah 29:7)**

We are pleased to invite you to the 69thEFI Annual Convention and the North India Urban Transformation Conference of EFI NCUT in New Delhi.

Plenary sessions on Biblical, contextual, and strategically important topics by prominent national Christian leaders. Some key plenary speakers include Dr. Prabhu Singh, Rev. Susanta Patra, Rev. Dr. Richard Howell, Dr. Sunil Kolhar, and Dr. Atul Aghamkar amongst others.

Seminars on crucial topics:

Urban Church (Outreach) Ministry	Ministry to the Urban Poor
Ministry to the Urban Migrants	Equipping Urban Leaders
Ministry to the Urban Neighbours	Freedom and Justice
Engaging with the Urban Youth	Prayer for the City / nation

Case Studies: Strategic ministries presentations, reconciliation and peace initiatives, constitutional values, and movements.

The event is open to all members of EFI from all India and for leaders from Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Delhi NCR.

The program will start from 4th September 2023 at 4pm and conclude on 7th September 2023 after lunch. EFI AGM Session - 5th September 2023 from 2.30pm – 4.30pm. (For EFI Constituent members only)

Registration Fee:

AC Double sharing accommodation and all Conference Meals /Snacks: Rs. 2500/- per person (Limited number available. Only on first-come-first-serve basis)
AC Dormitory accommodation and all Conference Meals /Snacks: Rs. 1000/- per person
Day Participants only. Covering all Conference Meals / Snacks: Rs. 500/- per person

To register, please go to <https://forms.gle/ywqJ1gA84zwmvzKa9>

Please note that the registration will be confirmed only after payment of the registration fee through the Bank details given below:

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** We encourage the participants to bear their own travel.

Please mark your calendars. **LAST DATE FOR REGISTRATION IS 20th AUGUST 2023.**
Do participate and be blessed, equipped, and mobilized for effective service.

For any further information, please contact at mail@efionline.org

Sonia Daniel- 9810656379,
Sara Chong- 8587959751,

Francis Kumar- 9886868420
Kumuda Sujay- 8884835321

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