

Mood and Modality in Christian Magazines: A Systemic Functional Analysis of Christian Women Mirror

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Abstract

This study presents an exploration of how interpersonal relationships are created and the nature of propositions in religious articles. Some columns in six editions of a Christian magazine, "Christian women mirror" were selected for analysis. The selected texts were broken down into clauses and analyzed for mood and modality within the frame work of Systemic Functional Grammar. The analysis reveals a mood structure that gives varying degrees of 'propositions' and 'proposals' that are capable of getting the readers persuaded. We concluded that the difference in the Lexico-grammar analysis and the Speech functions of the clauses are due to the need to get the readers persuaded about the Christian ideology.

Introduction

This paper is an investigation into the nature of propositions made in religious magazines from the perspective of Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG). Magazines and tracts are other means of preaching the gospel of Christ, in the modern day rather than the conventional church sermons. In fact, articles in magazines and tracts can simply be referred to as written sermons because they are written to get people persuaded about Christian life styles.

Articles in Christian magazines, just like sermons are pervaded by some strong ideological features which are intended to influence the readers in order to get them convinced and persuaded about the subject matter of the articles. These ideological features are inherent in the grammatical choices employed by the writers. Hence, it is worthwhile to carry out an analysis of the nature of propositions made by the writers to get the readers persuaded, from a grammatical point of view.

This paper will carry out a Lexico-grammatical analysis of a column in **The Christian Women Mirror Magazine** with the aim of identifying how interpersonal relationships are created between the writer and the readers as well as the nature and types of propositions made in the article and how committed is the writer to the propositions through the systems of mood and modality.

Language of Religion

The language of religion, which has been documented through the centuries, has its own historical development which has often been independent of the historical development of modern English. This is to explain that the language of religion has some peculiarities and characteristics, which makes it a register on its own.

Crystal and Davy (1969:164) observed that there were lots of irregular verbs still in their old forms till the modern age. Examples are 'spake', 'aileth', 'sayest', 'speaketh', etc in the use of pronouns, there are, thou, thine, thee, thyself, ye and the use of inflectional morphemes to indicate the third person singular where 's' would have been appropriate in modern usage. These archaisms are what Lamidi (2004:198) refers to as Victorian (Shakespearean) English, which are considered archaic in modern English as also pointed out in Babatunde(2005), the use of archaic forms is not only aimed at provoking a string feeling of reverence for the Almighty God But also targeted at making the adherents of the religion in question realize the unchanging nature of God.

Lexically, there are peculiar terms such as prophecy, miracle, salvation, restitution, saviour, sacred, sacrilege and so on. At the graphological level, the paragraph is always short, comprising not more than two to three sentences. The purpose is to make the message easily understandable. The sentences are therefore more often than not loosely – coordinated by additive conjunction ‘and’. At the semantic level, the meaning which religious language acquired is quite different from what is obtained in ordinary use of language. This is to say that the language usually has a deep meaning, which can only be understood by the users of the language. In essence, meanings are directed towards the winning of souls for the kingdom of God.

Ibiere (1991:20) explains further that at the level of syntax, the language has a variation of the left and the right branching sentences and this is meant to prevent monotony. This makes Babatunde (2005) citing Onuigbo (1996) to conclude that the language of religion shows a sustained disregard of formal syntactic and punctuation rules and the fact that the language is poetic in nature makes it exhibit syntactic and semantic deviations.

The language of religion is a form of language that claims to speak about supernatural realities in a manner whose sense or meaning is different from that of the ordinary language of day-to-day human life, (Komolafe 1992). It is therefore with mentioning that the perlocutionary effects of the language cannot be over-emphasized, that is, when used by the ‘right persons’.

Crystal and Davy (1973) observe that the kind of language a speech community uses for the expression of its religious beliefs on public occasions has its own distinctive and aesthetic part to play and its style has a cultural function and a linguistic impact which is generalisable beyond the original religious context in which it appears, due to the belief of the users that the language is being spoken ‘as the spirit gave utterance’, (Adelowo 2005). This also explains the reason for the solemn nature of the language of religion since the aim is to invoke and glorify a particular deity and also to accomplish a given action or deed. The use of the language is to facilitate communication in order to enable useful, appropriate and expected action to take place.

The distinctiveness of the language of Christian religion is due to the cultural and linguistic background of the language of the Bible, which is the basis for the Christian evangelism. As explained by Crystal and Davy (1969), the cultural and linguistic background to liturgical language exerts a unique range of pressures on the choice of forms to be used. According to them therefore, there seem to be three main influences:

“Firstly, there are the linguistic originals; the Bible, book of common prayers, the requirement of conformity to the sacred character as well as the sense, of the text in the original language is a restriction on one’s choice of English. Also, there are traditional formulations of belief of doctrinal significance, which are difficult to alter without an accusation of inconsistency or heresy being leveled (P149)”

Language is used in Christian religion to perform different functions; to persuade, convince, control behaviour, pacify and win over new converts. The appropriate use of the language could bring about the expected result from the listeners. Hence, our analysis of mood and modality of a Christian Magazine is to explore how writers of Christian articles attempt to persuade, convince, control behaviour of, and win over readers through the systems of mood and modality.

Theoretical Framework

This study has as its theoretical framework, the Hallidayan Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG). The Systemic Functional Grammar approach in linguistics considers grammar in terms of usage and the creation of meaning. It takes the resource perspective rather than the rule perspective; and it is designed to display the overall system of grammar rather than only fragment. (Halliday & Mathiessen 2004).

According to Halliday & Hassan (1985:4) SFG perspective of Language is concerned with “attempt to relate Language primarily to a particular aspect of human experience, namely, that of social structure”. This relationship between Language and social situation implies that language use is viewed as a system of choices made among other options or ways of communication available within the context. Thus, SFG equally states that context of situation is arranged in categories. These categories are Field, Tenor and Mode and the three Met functions corresponding to the categories are Experiential, Interpersonal and Textual respectively. Experiential Metafunction looks at grammar of a clause as representation and it is realized by the systems of transitivity, Interpersonal Metafunction views grammar of a clause as exchange and it is realized by the systems of mood and modality. While Textual Metafunction views the grammar of clause as message and it is realized by the system of theme.

According to the SFG, A clause is viewed as realizing these three layers of meaning referred to as metafunctions and they are the three modes of meaning that are “present in every use of language in every social context” (Halliday, 1987:112). The lexico-grammatical systems of Transitivity, Mood and Theme are at work in the conversion of these semantic metafunctions into structural patterns.

In this study, our major concern is the interpersonal metafunction which is realized by the systems of mood and modality. According to Halliday&Hassan (1985:8), Clause in interpersonalmetafunction is considered as a piece of interaction between the speakers and listener. Butt, et al (1995:13) explains further that interpersonal metafunction uses language to encode interaction and to show how defensible or binding we find our proposition or proposal”.

Mood is the component of Lexicogrammar which realizes interpersonal metafunction (where clause is considered to be an exchange). A clause is therefore analysed into mood and residue; mood element is further analyzed into subject and finite. The subject and complement are typically realized by nominal groups, the finite is realized by the tensed element of the verb and the predicate is realized by the non-tensed element of the verb.

The mood structure indicates how clause is structured to realize the speech functions of offer, command, statement and question in interaction From the Lexico-grammatical structure of a clause, a statement is realized by declarative mood, question is realized by interrogative mood and command is realized by imperative mood.

Modality, however, refers to the degree of certainty and truth of statements about the world. Modality consists of modulation which is realized by modal verb operators such as may,will, and must; and modulation realized by mood adjuncts. It is the general term for all signs of speakers’ opinion and attitude (Butt, etal 1995).

This study is therefore expected to explore the system of mood and modality in Christian magazines with the aim of identifying the nature of propositions/proposals made by the writers and how valid they are.

Purpose of Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine how interpersonal relationship is created by analyzing the nature of propositions made by the writer of Christian magazines; how valid are the propositions/proposals and how the readers are represented in the magazine through the system of mood and modality. Thus, the study is purely interpersonal metafunction analysis within the purview of System Functional Grammar.

Description of Data

The corpus for analysis in this study is a column of a Christian magazine known as **Christian Women Mirror**. This magazine is a publication of the women organization of Deeper Life Christian Bible Church. Deeper Christian Life Bible Church is one of the Pentecostal churches in Nigeria known for sound Christian doctrine and the preaching of the gospel of Jesus with much emphasis on holy living and righteous walk with God.

For the purpose of this study, six editions of the magazine (January to June 2014) are selected and only the column tagged “From the General Superintendent” in each of the editions is chosen for the purpose of analysis. This column is always written by the General Superintendent of the Church – Pastor W.F. Kumuyi.

The text of the selected column in each of the editions is broken down to clauses for Lexico-grammatical analysis. Each clause is analyzed for mood and modality. For space constraint, the full lexico-grammatical analysis of the text is not presented here but the summary of the analysis is given. (For the full text of the data see the appendix).

Data Analysis

The table below gives the summary of the result of the mood analysis showing the proportion of each mood choice to the total number of ranking clause ineach edition in a percentage term.

Table 1

Mood choice	Jan. Edition		Feb. Edition		March Edition		April Edition		May Edition		June Edition		Total	%
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%		
Declarative mood	29	80.5	30	96.7	32	86.4	30	88.2	23	100	21	63.6	165	85%
Interrogative	2	5.5	-	-	-	-	4	11.7	-	-	1	3	07	3.6%
Imperative	5	13.8	1.	3.3	5	13.5	-	-	-	-	11	33.3	22	11.3%
Total Ranking Clause	36		31		37		34		23		333		194	

According to the table 1 above, out of 36 ranking clauses in January edition, 8.5% are in declarative mood, 5.5% are in interrogative mood and 13.8% imperative mood. February edition has 96.7% declarative mood and 3.3% imperative mood and no single clause with interrogative mood out of 31 ranking clauses. In March edition 86.4% of the total 37 ranking clauses are in declarative mood and the remaining 13.5% are in imperative mood. The 34 ranking clauses in April edition has 88.2% declarative mood, 11.7% interrogative and 0% imperative mood. May edition has 23 ranking clauses which are all in declarative mood. June edition has 33 ranking clauses out of which 63.6% are in declarative mood and 33.3% imperative mood while the remaining 3% are in interrogative mood.

In all the six editions of the magazines, 194 ranking clauses were analyzed for mood and the result reveals that 85% of the clauses are in declarative mood, 11.3% are in imperative mood, while 3.6% are in interrogative mood.

The dominance of declarative mood in our analysis indicates that the writer's chief concern of the writer in the articles is to offer the readers some information convincing enough to get the readers persuaded. The mood choices of the writer in each edition have helped to achieve the purpose of the texts which is to convince and persuade. The texts are structured in a way that the clauses with declarative mood are assigned varying degrees of speech functions which all hang together to achieve a persuasive text.

Declarative Mood is used by the writer to offer convincing information on the nature, characteristics and infinite love of God. Here are some examples from the texts:

- i. One of the most awesome nature and characteristics of God is His faithfulness.
- ii. He never lies and never fails to fulfill His promises
- iii. God is also faithful to those who put their trust in Him.
- iv. He sheds His blood on the cross of Calvary to pay the ransom for your soul.

The declarative mood in the above clauses expresses the writer's perception of God's nature. He presents his perception of the nature of God as an assurance for the readers to trust in God. In some other ways, declarative mood is used by the writer to re-echo the promises of mankind and to the readers in particular.

- v. God is telling you that He will be there for you this year.

A closer exploration of the mood structure of the texts still reveals that declarative mood is equally used in the texts to pass judgment, condemn and warn the readers against certain attitudes or character the writer considered to be the hindrance to enjoying the goodness of God. The following clauses illustrate the usage:

- i. However, the only snag to you enjoying God's presence this year will be if you are not a Christian (January Edition)
- ii. There is no time to waste (January Edition)
- iii. Procrastination has many undesirable consequences (March Edition)

The last two clauses above are offering warning in their speech functions but lexico-grammatically they are declaratives. This shows that there is no one to one correspondence between the Lexico-grammar of a clause and its interpersonal meaning in context.

The few clauses with interrogative mood in the texts are used by the writer to demand the readers' opinion and agreement on the ideology put forward by the declarative clauses. The interrogatives are the signs of the writer's negotiation with the readers.

The following clauses illustrate the usage:

- i. How will you repay the huge sacrifice? (April Edition)
- ii. Have you ever wondered why God did not send angels to die for you and whole humanity? (April Edition)
- iii. Will you allow His death to be in vain in your life (April Edition)
- iv. Now, how do you rest God’s presence (January Edition)
- v. What other assurance do you need? (February Edition)
- vi. Is this your main reason for living? (February Edition)

Whenever the writer uses interrogative mood in the texts, interaction is encouraged. Through this, the reader is directly involved and carried along.

The imperative mood is used by the writer to give specific instructions after some proposition have been given:

- i. You must also not procrastinate when it comes to sharing the gospel with the lost (March Edition)
- ii. Determine as an individual, to make your life count (January Edition)
- iii. Renew your life at the end of each day (June Edition)
- iv. Surrender your life to Jesus if you haven’t done so (June Edition)
- v. Forget the past (June Edition)
- vi. Forget your shortcomings and failures of the past years.
- vii. The husband and wife must each obey these instructions, if their marriage is to grow.

Clauses with imperative mood like these are ordinarily expected to function as authoritative command but the context of these texts makes it clear that the writer does not have the authority to give the readers any form of command. Thus, the above clauses, though lexico-grammatically are imperative, function as offer of advice and plea meant to persuade the readers to take actions, change behaviour or attitude in line with the writer’s proposition or ideology which may be taken or turned down by the reader.

Modality in the Texts

Table 2 below presents the summary of the use of modality in the texts. The frequency with which modality is expressed in the texts are shown here in percentage term.

Table 2

	Jan		Febr.		March		April		May		June		Total
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	
Modalization	0	13.8	3	9.6	2	5.4	1	2.9	0		1	4	14
Modulation	5	0%	6	19.3	5	13.5	3	8.8	5	13	3	9	26
Total Ranking Clause	36		31		37		34		23		33		

The table above, shows the frequency with which modality is expressed by the verbal constituents of the clauses. According to the table, the total number of modalized clauses is 14 out of 194 clauses and that of modulated clauses is 26 out of 194 clauses. Thus modalized clauses in all the texts are 7.2% and modulated clauses are 13.4%. From this table, it is evident that the use of modality is low in all the texts. The writer must have avoided the use of many modal verb operators (modulated and modalized clauses) in order not to be too subjective and authoritative but still factual and frank.

The few modalized clauses reinforce the validity of the writer’s propositions across the texts. For instance:

- i. You will live eternally (April Edition)
- ii. He will be faithful to you (February)
- iii. You will be effective in your Christian services (February)

The modal operators in the above clauses express the definiteness or certainty of the propositions. The modulated clauses such as the ones below:

- i. You must be wise and judicious in the use of your time (June)
- ii. She should submit to him in everything
- iii. He will give you the grace and power to obey his word,

These clauses are used by the writer to express God's proposals to the readers by showing the inclination of God to help the reader as found in clause (iii) above.

Equally, clauses 1 and 2 above are the samples of modulated clauses expressing obligation in terms of what is required from the readers. It is observed in our analysis that most of the clauses that are highly modulated are all in imperative mood telling the readers what is expected from them.

Through the use of modal verb operator "must" The writer is able to assume a superior position to give instruction to the readers.

Findings and Summary

From the Lexico-grammatical analysis of our data, the dominance of declarative mood is observed. The dominance of the declarative MOOD choice in the texts reveals the specific pattern that sermon texts can take in 'the written mode'. The writer gives information about their personal perception and experiences of God to make the message real and convincing to elicit a positive reaction from the readers. A written communication such as our texts is usually non-interactive, where the possibility of feedback between the writer and his audience is either limited or non-existent. This is evident by the dominance of declarative mood and scanty population of interrogative mood.

It is equally noted that the Lexico-grammatical structure of a clause do not usually correspond with the speech function just as some declarative clauses are not merely statement but advice. This is in line with the assertion of Butt, et al (1995:75) that "yet the relation between lexico-grammar and interpersonal meanings is not always straightforward – information can be sought using the imperative and declarative mood as well as interrogative and there is no normal way of encoding an offer of goods and services".

Also, this study equally reveals that the Christian writings such as our data are full of both "propositions" and "proposals" meant to persuade the readers to accept the Christian ideology whole heartedly. Because what is expressed in these texts is generally accepted and acclaimed as the words of God, so the writer does not much exploit the resources of 'hedging' – "the variety of means by which one can say something a little short of indicating that something categorically is, or is not, the case" -- This accounts for the sparse use of modality in the texts. This is a sharp contrast between Christian writings and the academic journals, where the authors of the academic articles try to avoid making bald statements and taking authorial position, thereby hedge their propositions/proposals by the use of modal verbs and modal adjuncts.

Conclusion

Thompson points out that language is a system of choices, each choice contributes to the meaning and by looking at the choices we can explore how the resources of the language have been used to construct meaning (2004: 35). Modality is a sign that the writer is presenting a personal view rather than an objective fact. With these a writer can signal his degree of certainty about the validity of a proposition. The system of Mood and Modality are used to investigate the writers' commitment to the validity of his message (proposition). Religious articles are full of propositions which are geared towards achieving a purpose, mostly, to persuade the readers to accept their ideology. To present their argument convincingly, some grammatical choices are employed and some grammatical features are manipulated.

This study has revealed that most articles in Christian magazines are motivational and persuasive in nature. The mood structure of most Christian writings are manipulated to give varying degrees of speech functions ("propositions" and "proposals") convincing enough to get the readers persuaded.

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Christian Women's
MIRROR
CONTENTS

From the General Superintendent
The Coast Is Clear 2

Cover Story
Forward! Onward! Upward! . . . 3

Feature Piece
Remember God's Promise
and Forget the Past 5

Treasure Chest
Press On toward
the Goal 8

Did you know that . . .
Page 8

Bible Quiz
Page 8

Tracts of Life
The Past Is a Distraction . . . 8 - 9

Quotable Quotes
Page 8-9


The Bible through the Year
Page 9

Corporate Prayers
Page 9

Manuals
Bit by Bit 9

The Virtuous Woman
Looking unto Jesus 10

Child Training
Take Another Step! 13



From The GENERAL SUPERINTENDENT

THE COAST IS CLEAR

As we all celebrate the dawn of a New Year, determine, as an individual, to make your life count. This is not about making resolutions you can't keep; you probably made such resolves in previous years and couldn't keep any. It is about leaning solely on God, and letting Him drive your life. The Scripture says in Deuteronomy 31:8, "**And the LORD, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed.**" In His infinite love, God is telling you that He will be there for you this year. What other assurance do you need? The Creator of the universe says He will not abandon you, but will be by your side all the time. All He is asking you to do is to hold on to Him by faith, and allow Him take you to the acme of success.

So, the coast is clear for you to live a victorious and fruitful Christian life, and to succeed in your life's endeavours this year. The coast is clear, you have nothing to worry about. God desires to be with you in all that you do. He wants to be there for you no matter the circumstance. Whether you are facing problems that seem insurmountable, undertaking various tasks, meeting emergencies or taking advantage of opportunities that come your way, God wants you to know that He is with you in all you do. So, rest your soul in His presence. Forget your shortcomings and failures of the past year, and move ahead to a whole new experience with Him this New Year.

Now, how do you rest your soul in God's presence?

(1) Look inward. Take stock of your life—look at your relationship with God and with others in the previous years. Hold each area of your life alongside God's standards and pray to grow in faithfulness and holiness (Psalm 139:23-24). As you take the time to look inward, you will be encouraged when you see the areas where you did well, and you will have great hope when you sense God's help, encouragement and leading in overcoming those areas where you failed. Be honest with God and yourself, and you will experience a great refreshing from Him, which will give you the enthusiasm you need to change.

(2) Look upward. Since Jesus is the Author and Finisher of our faith, this means He is at work right now in your life. As long as you keep looking to Him, you will find the sufficient grace to move forward in all areas of your life. This year, stay focus on Jesus, who is the Author and Finisher of your faith. He is there to see you through any circumstance you may encounter. As you focus on Jesus, you will encounter His presence, which will add another dimension to your faith. This will encourage you to boldly move forward.

However, the only snag to your enjoying God's presence this year will be if you are not a Christian. God's promises and provisions are for His children. You are only assured of victory and success if you become a child of God by repenting from your sins and accepting Jesus as your Saviour and Lord. Remember, as a Christian, God is your sufficiency, and you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you daily.

Christian Women

MIRROR

CONTENTS

From the General Superintendent

Always Faithful 2

Cover Story

Hold my Hand 3

Feature Piece

The Companion That Never Fails 5

Treasure Chest

Let God Hold your Hand. . . 8

Did you know that . . .

Page 8

Bible Quiz

Page 8

Tracts of Life

Let Him Hear You 8 - 9

Quotable Quotes

Page 8-9

The Bible through the Year

Page 9

Corporate Prayers

Page 9

Manuals

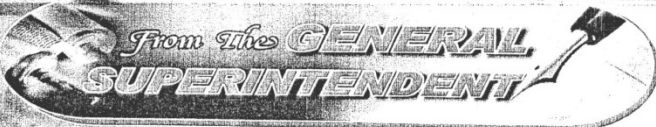
Enter into your Rest 9

The Virtuous Woman

Lest I Stray 10

Child Training

Entrust the Child to Him 13



ALWAYS FAITHFUL

One of the most awesome nature and characteristics of God is His faithfulness.²The Bible declares, "...**He is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations**" (Deuteronomy 7:9). Unlike-men, He never lies and never fails to fulfill His promises.⁷Man is frail, inconsistent, undependable, and mortal, but God is dependable, immortal, unchangeable, and always faithful.²His Word and promises are reliable and ever true, for He honours His Word more than His Name (Psalm 138:2).

²In a world that is constantly changing and evolving, God is the only one that remains dependable.⁷In the face of unpredictable circumstances, broken agreements and the ever-changing variables of life—you can stake your life on one thing: God is faithful—and He will never change. He says in Malachi 3:6, "**I am the LORD, I change not....**"

¹⁰God is faithful to His Word.¹⁴If He said something, you can count on its authenticity and His commitment to make it good.⁷He speaks no idle words.³Every word that He speaks is with purpose and backed with His almighty power.

¹⁴God is also faithful to those who put their trust in Him;¹⁵ He never disappoints them.¹⁴If you are a sinner, He is faithful to forgive and save you when you repent of your sins, "**If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness**" (1 John 1:9).¹⁴And if you are already a Christian, He is faithful to make you holy and fill you with the power of the Holy Spirit, so that you will be effective in your Christian service (Deuteronomy 30:6; Acts 1:8).¹⁴When there are some things in your life that need changing, you can equally count on the faithfulness of His Word to accomplish it. "**So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it**" (Isaiah 55:11).

¹¹God is faithful even when you doubt Him.²Your unfaithfulness does not change who He is in the least bit.²⁴There had been probably times in your life when you were unfaithful to Him because of the difficulties you were passing through.²⁴Yet, He gave you succour and delivered you from your troubles.²⁴As a faithful Father, He is watching over you, and your belief or unbelief cannot change that, "**If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself**" (2 Timothy 2:13).

²⁴Like everyone else, you have many needs—physical, emotional, and spiritual needs, and you have these needs every day of your life.²⁴Lamentations 3:23 gives the assurance that God takes care of all these needs on a daily basis. His grace and mercies come day by day. Nothing you truly need will ever be withheld from you because God is faithful.²⁴Being faithful is not just something God does—it is who He is. And because FAITHFUL is who He is, you can be absolutely sure that He will be faithful to you at all times, everywhere, and in whatever circumstances you face.

²⁴However, God demands something from you in return for His faithfulness: trust Him and obey His Word and be faithful as He is.²⁴So, as you relate with His faithfulness, your prayer should be:

³¹"Oh, May all who come behind me find me faithful,
³²May the fire of my devotion light their way,
³³May the footprints that I leave lead them to believe,
 And the life that I live inspires them to obey.
 Amen!"

Christian Women
MIRROR
CONTENTS

From the General Superintendent
Make Up your Mind 2

Cover Story
Later may Be Late 3

Feature Piece
The Tragedy of Being Unprepared. 5

Treasure Chest
Page 8

Did you know that . . .
Page 8

Bible Quiz
Page 8

Tracts of Life
Regret of the Sluggard 8 - 9

Quotable Quotes
Page 8-9

The Bible through the Year
Page 9

Corporate Prayers
Page 9

Manuals
Tick Tock9

The Virtuous Woman
Strike while the Iron Is Hot10

Child Training
Act Now13



MAKE UP YOUR MIND

As a human being, you make decisions daily through either your actions or inactions, which culminate in the totality of your life here on earth.¹ The mind is the collective aspects of intellect and consciousness. It is the will to take whatever decision you want to, the ability to do something or not to do it.² The phrase, "make up your mind," or "make your mind up" means to *decide what to choose*. God has freely given the mind to all humans.³ The Bible tells us we are a free moral agent.⁴ This implies we can act without compulsion and in accordance with our own individual desires or inclinations.⁵ A computer is not a free moral agent. It does exactly what it is programmed to do. It does not have the ability to go against its programming.⁶ An animal also does not have the ability to go against its programming.⁷ It does exactly what its DNA (its program) tells it to do, no more, and no less.⁸ Neither a computer nor an animal can do things that are original, creative, or unexpected (in an absolute sense).⁹ They cannot do differently than what they were always meant to do. A free moral agent is an intelligent being that is at liberty to act according to his choice, without compulsion or restraint.

So, as a free moral agent, you have the liberty to choose what you want or take a desired course of action.¹⁰ In other words, you have the will power to choose or do anything.¹¹ With the freedom God has given to you to choose what you will, you are responsible for every decision you take in life, and for the consequence of such decision. Yet, in His infinite love for you, He counsels, **"I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live"** (Deuteronomy 30:19).¹² God says yes, you have the freedom to choose what you will, but be wise in the choices you make in life.

That we have a personal responsibility to make choices proves God's attributes of love, fairness, and equity to all.¹³ That He also counsels us to make choices that are beneficiary to our lives here and in eternity shows His concern and Fatherly love for all. Unfortunately, however, some people make wrong choices, and some do not get to choose at all because they cannot make up their mind on crucial matters of life.¹⁴ Yet, others take decisions too late because of procrastination and consequently, experience failure or defeat.

Procrastination has many undesirable consequences.¹⁵ It leads to academic failure, collapse of marriage, raising of ungodly and wayward children, loss of job, loss of life, and worst of all, eternal damnation of the soul, among other consequences.

There are things in life that should never be delayed. Jesus tells us that reconciling with an aggrieved Christian Brother or Sister should be done immediately we recall the offence (Matthew 5:23-24).¹⁶ He also counsels that we should quickly settle matters with our adversaries (verse 25).¹⁷ However distasteful it may be to pursue peace with an enemy, you must avoid stalling as a Christian. Similarly, we are instructed, **"Let not the sun go down upon your wrath"** (Ephesians 4:26).¹⁸ Dealing appropriately with your anger is a matter of great importance, and you must not put it off until later; that will give the devil a foothold in your life (verse 27).¹⁹ You must also not procrastinate when it comes to sharing the gospel with the lost.²⁰ There is no time to waste.²¹ Winning souls is a very urgent task, especially at this time when people are dying like chickens every day.

Some people delay making a response when they hear the gospel.²² This is the most dangerous type of procrastination.²³ Life is short, and we do not know what will happen the next moment (James 4:13-14).²⁴ If you have been putting off your salvation as a sinner, make up your mind now to repent from your sins and accept Jesus into your life.²⁵ Do not push it to a later time because later may be too late for you.

Special Edition

Christian Women
MIRROR
CONTENTS

From The **GENERAL SUPERINTENDENT**

From the General Superintendent

- So Much Sacrifice 2
- Demands my All 3
- Free on His Own Account . . . 7
- Why will You Die? 8
- Like a Grain of Wheat 8-9
- Celebrate Him 9
- Power in His blood. 11
- A Fact of History 13
- Glorifying God's Glory. . . 15

SO MUCH SACRIFICE

"Love, Love, Love! All the world needs is love," so goes the familiar line. But no greater love makes the world go round like the one that made the Lord Jesus Christ leave the grandeur of heaven to sacrifice His life for your sin and that of the whole world. In His infinite love for you, He shed His blood on the Cross of Calvary to pay the ransom for your soul. He made a huge sacrifice to save you from eternal punishment—far greater sacrifice than any human can make for even their loved ones. **"For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"** (Romans 5:7, 8). The innocent, sinless One died in your place to cleanse you from sin and reconcile you to God. **"For [God] hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him"** (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Have you ever wondered why God did not send angels to die for you and the whole of humanity? Perhaps, such sacrifice was too much for them to bear for humans. But Jesus, propelled by deep love for you, came to this world and died for your sin. Beginning from His betrayal to His crucifixion, He suffered much for your sake. One of His twelve inner-circle disciples, Judas Iscariot, betrayed Him to His crucifiers. As if that was not devastating enough, Simon Peter, His trusted and frontline disciple, promptly denied Him when the Jews arrested him. Other disciples had earlier deserted Him; they all forsook Him when He needed them most (Matthew 26:56).

To intensify His suffering, the same people He came to save ridiculed and derided Him. They lied against Him, spat on His face, slapped Him, stripped Him of His garment, scourged and tortured Him, wore a crown of thorns on His head and made Him carry a heavy cross up the long road to Calvary. Ultimately, they crucified Him on this cross, driving heavy nails into His forehands and feet. They ridiculously demanded the release of a murderer in His place (Luke 23:18-19; Acts 3:14), and crucified the Holy and Just One like a common criminal (Matthew 27:38). He was made a shameful spectacle to the world!

More painful still, God the Father turned His back on His beloved Son, because He was bearing your sins and that of the whole world. Hence, He cried, **"Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"** (Matthew 27:46). The Captain of our salvation bore all these sufferings and reproaches so that you won't be damned. What great love! (John 15:13). He suffered great agony for you . . . **the just for the unjust, that he might bring [you] to God"** (1 Peter 3:18), and now you can have salvation, sanctification, Holy Spirit Baptism, healing, deliverance, all spiritual, physical blessings and eternal life.

After this much sacrifice for you, will you spurn Jesus' invitation to salvation? Will you allow His death to be in vain in your life? Jesus has paid the ultimate penalty for your sin, how will you repay the huge sacrifice? It is wisdom to appreciate and appropriate His sacrifice for you by confessing and repenting of your sins now, and accepting Him as your Saviour and Lord. Then, you will live eternally!

CONTENTS

From the General Superintendent
 Play your Part 2

Cover Story
 Earn the Respect, Please . . . 3

Feature Piece
 Winsome Character and Gracious Conduct in the Family . . 5

Treasure Chest
 Page 8

Did you know That
 Page 8

Bible Quiz
 Page 8

Tracts of Life
 A Provider or an Infidel 8 - 9

Quotable Quotes
 Page 8-9

The Bible through the Year
 Page 9

Corporate Prayers
 Page 9

Manuals
 Little Things That Matter . . . 9

The Virtuous Woman
 Distinctively Feminine 10

Child Training
 It's a Joint Effort 13

From the General Superintendent

PLAY YOUR PART

Although God made man the crown of His creation, He considered it *"not good that the man should be alone"* (Genesis 2:18) but have a close companion—a helpmate. Hence, He made the woman from the man's rib and thus instituted the marriage union, symbolically making the man and his wife one flesh. In this mystical union, the spouses are to be united in heart, mind and purpose. They are also to live together as long as they are both alive (Romans 7:1-3). Divorce, remarriage, or even separation should not dissolve the union, *"What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder"* (Matthew 19:6).

However, just as they have different make up, outlook and needs, the man and the woman have different roles to play in the marriage relationship. God, in His divine wisdom, has assigned individual responsibilities to each spouse, which are clearly spelt out in the Scriptures. Ephesians 5:22-33, for instance, has a set of instructions for the couple, which are the keystone for success in any marriage. The husband and the wife must each obey these instructions, if their marriage is to grow, blossom and be blissful as God intends it to be.

The husband is the head of the marriage union. His ultimate duty is to love his wife, *"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it"* (Ephesians 5:25). Frankly speaking, the whole of the husband's responsibilities is summed up in this single duty of love for his wife. It means the authority of the man over the woman is founded on his love for her, and this love must be strong enough for him to willingly risk his life for her as Christ for the Church. As the care of the family devolves on the wife, and the children must owe the chief direction of their minds and formation of their character to the mother, the woman has need of all the assistance and support she can get from her husband. She deserves the utmost of his love and affection. Aside the deep love and affection for his wife, the man is to be the primary income-earner and breadwinner of the family (1 Timothy 5:8).

On the other hand, the primary duty of the wife is to submit to and respect her husband, *"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord"* (Ephesians 5:22). God has given the prerogative of headship to the man, and no family prospers where that arrangement is violated. Within proper metes and limits, therefore, it is the duty of the wife to obey, respect, or submit herself to her husband. She should submit to him in everything except issues bothering on conscience and religion, and never undermine his authority for any reason. Other roles of the wife

include supporting the husband in providing for the family or be a shared breadwinner, especially if she earns good income and can cope with such responsibility, as well as be the homemaker and caregiver for the children (Titus 2:4, 5).

The fundamental duty of each spouse is couched in Ephesians 5:33, *"Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband."* Your troubled marriage can grow into a blessed and lasting relationship when you as a husband or wife play your scriptural role as discussed above. But of course, you know you can't successfully apply the Bible to your life and situation except you are born again. You need to surrender your life and marriage to Jesus, the Author of life and marriage itself, and He will give you the grace and power to obey his Word and have a happy marriage.

From the General Superintendent

CONTENTS

- From the General Superintendent**
- Seize the Day 2
- Cover Story**
- Moment by Moment 3
- Feature Piece**
- A Life Well Spent 5
- Tracts Of Life**
- Like a Blade of Grass 8
- Manuals**
- The Appointed Time 8-9
- Quotable Quotes**
- Page 8
- The Bible through the Year**
- Page 8-9
- Did you know that**
- Page 8-9
- Bible Quiz**
- Page 9
- Corporate Prayers**
- Page 9
- Treasure Chest**
- "Time" and "Eternity" 9
- The Virtuous Woman**
- The Proverbs 31 Woman . . . 10
- Child Training**
- As a Ripple Effect 13

SEIZE THE DAY

Each new day you get to live comes as a gift from God and is filled with opportunities that may never come your way again—until you leave this earth. Therefore, making the most of the present moment is wisdom. If you don't make the most of the moment, you lose it and all the benefits it offers you. You must take advantage of every opportunity that comes your way to fulfil your purpose in life. Someone advises, "Don't be fooled by the calendar. There are only as many days in the year as you make use of. One man gets only a week's value out of a year while another man gets a full year's value out of a week."

Unfortunately, we get so caught up in the details of every day to day living many times that we just don't have the time to seize the day or the moment! We have deadlines and commitments, problems and priorities, distractions and obstacles, and though we really want much fulfilment from each day, it just doesn't seem to be within our grasp. No one wants life to be just average, at least not many of us are willing to admit it. But by nature, we want our lives to be full and prosperous. Advertisers know about this basic human desire that we have and produce it into slogans: *Who Says You Can't Have It All, Just Do It, Satisfy Your Thirst, Life Is A Journey—Enjoy The Ride* and so on.

God's way of encouraging you to live a good life is enshrined in Philippians 3:7-16. If you would only learn to follow the example of Apostle Paul in this Scripture, you would learn to make the most of every opportunity you have and live life to the fullest, no matter how hectic your life may seem. Paul shows in this passage, three ways to live a more fulfilling life.

(1) *Find a purpose* (verse 10-11). Many people believe that their purpose in life is to be a good wife or husband, a good mother or father, do their job better, be a good teacher, doctor, salesman, and so on. To be fair to them, all these are good purposes in life, but they are all secondary purposes. God's primary purpose for every person is to accept Jesus as Saviour and Lord, live to advance His Kingdom here on earth and turn others to Him. Is this your main reason for living?

(2) *Forget the past* (verse 13). There are two elements of the past that you must forget—the bad and the good. You must stop brooding over your past mistakes and frittering away your time relieving the "good old days." Move on with your life!

(3) *Face the present* (verse 13). It is easy to live in the past and dream away the future. But it is a challenge to face the present, because it means you can no longer allow yourself the luxury of saying, "One of these days I'll do something about my temper . . . my commitment to God . . . my health . . . my responsibility to my family" and so on.

To enjoy living and fulfil God's purpose for your life, you must be wise and judicious in the use of your time. Live every day as if it were going to be your last. If you have lost opportunities, repent and re-plan your time and life. Renew your life at the end of each day, and re-fire for the next day by making right the wrongs of the previous day. Surrender your life to Jesus if you haven't done so, and seize every moment of every day to serve God and influence the people around you positively.