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06 Apr 08

Filled them up to the Brim

Praise the Lord for an orderly and God-honouring Annual Congregational Meeting and Election of the third Session of the Vancouver Bible-Presbyterian Church (VBPC). The Reverend Colin Wong, formerly of Life B-P Church, is now the pastor of VBPC. The rest of the Session members are Elder Henry Hageman, Deacons Andrew Chow, Edwin Seow and PJ Teo. You may not know them personally, but you can still pray for them. Pray for Pastor Colin that his clergy permit would be approved.

Last week, we considered the response of the host at the wedding in Cana when the wine was served — wine that was made from water. John's Gospel tells us that he did not know where the wine came from, but the servants who brought up the wine knew (John 2:9). The servants knew that it was the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. He brought blessings into the lives of some people through other people. And that is how Christians should see ourselves. We are channels of God's blessings. Through us — our labour in the ministry, our prayers, our giving, our words of encouragement, our testimony for Christ — others are spiritually blessed. It is my prayer that as members of Calvary, we will continue to be channels of blessings one to another within the church as well as to others without. The extent to which we are channels of God's blessings depend on our obedience to our Lord Jesus.

### **Whatsoever He Saith (Exclusive Obedience)**

Jesus was at the wedding when the wine ran out. Mary, our Lord's mother, came to Him and said, "They have no wine." Our Lord Jesus replied, "*Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come*" (John 2:4). This is not to be taken as a sign of disrespect or reproof. It is clear that it was our Lord's intention to provide the wine, but He would not be rushed into doing it ahead of time. Our sovereign God will do what He has purposed to do at His appointed time.

When the fulness of the time was come, He sent forth his Son (Gal 4:4). Before the hour of His death came, our Lord Jesus did not seek to die. When the hour came, He did not seek to defer it. Before the said time, it was pointless for Mary to be anxious; as it is for us to be worry and be anxious about things before their time. When the appointed time is come, God will act.

Mary recognised this and thus she said to the servants, "*Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it*" (John 2:5). Here is an important principle if we would be channels of God's blessings: we must give exclusive obedience to God.

There is a tendency for Christians to do what is necessary and good at the expense of obedience to God. It was necessary and good to provide the wine to save the host of the wedding from embarrassment. The plea was sincere. The need was real. The intentions were even noble. But if it was not done in obedience to God and in submission to His leading, it would have been wrong. Christians must remember that we cannot do wrong in order to do right. Christians ought not to use circumstances as the bases for our action. Instead, we must do what God has told us to do. "*Whatsoever **He** saith unto you, do it*" (John 2:5).

There is also a tendency for Christians to take a particular course of action because their friends are doing the same. To give obedience to men (regardless of who they are) over God and

His truth is idolatry. The Americans have their *American Idols*. It seems that the Christians also have their Christian idols. Beware, our Lord Jesus warns, *“Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch”* (Matt 15:14).

If we would be channels of God’s blessings, and instruments of His grace, we must be do whatsoever He says.

### **Whatsoever He Saith...Do It (Complete Obedience)**

There is also a need for Christians to exercise full and complete obedience. We may not choose what we would like to do. We may not pick and choose what commands we would obey and what we may neglect. *“Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it”* (John 2:5). We may not do that which is pleasant and leave undone things which are not to our liking. The preaching of the Good News of salvation must entail the rebuke of sins. The former is pleasant and popular; the latter is not. Dear Calvinists, if we would walk in the steps of our Lord Jesus, our obedience to Him must be complete.

*“Whatsoever He saith unto you.”* The question is how do we know what our Lord says? Of course, we do not hear His voice as the servants at the wedding did. Nevertheless, we hear Him loud and clear through His Word. He speaks so that sinners may know how to be saved. He speaks so that believers may walk in His path of righteousness.

*“Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it.”* It is the doing what He says that is important. Never mind the consequences and the price of obedience, we are to simply obey.

### **They Filled...to the Brim (Whole-Hearted Obedience)**

Our Lord had spoken. It was left to the servants to do what He had told them. He told them to fill the waterpots with water. We read that *“They filled them up to the brim”* (John 2:7). The six waterpots would hold about 600 gallons. The servants could have filled them halfway or even three-quarters, and no one would know. But they filled them up to the brim.

Likewise in your Christian ministry, you could do the bare minimum and present to Christ a half-filled waterpot. If the servants gave a half-filled waterpot, who would be the loser? The wedding guests.

If you serve God at the minimum level, who would be the loser? Answer: Those to whom God has appointed to receive His blessings through you. They could not get their fill of God’s blessings because you were slackened in doing your job.

The measure of our effectiveness in our service for God is in part a result of the passion and the zeal that we put into the work. Paul exhorts us, *“Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord”* (Rom 12:11). He also said that *“it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing”* (Gal 4:18). He told the Corinthians to *“covet earnestly the best gifts”* (1 Cor 12:31).

Our Lord Jesus could have provided the wine at the wedding without anyone having to lift a finger or twitch a muscle. But He chose to use human instruments to fulfil His work. God who ordained the ends also ordained the means to accomplish those ends. What a privilege it is that we are His chosen instruments, and how then must we serve Him who loved us and gave His life for us. Dear beloved, it is only when we do what our Lord Jesus has called us to do, and to do it whole-heartedly that the labour of our hands will bear the heavenly results. May we press on with the Lord this year and with the newly elected session.

13 Apr 08  
The discipline of giving

Greetings from Vancouver, Canada in the precious name of our Lord Jesus Christ. As you read this letter, I should be preparing to return to Singapore. I am scheduled to fly off on Monday (14<sup>th</sup> April, 2008). I thank God for the opportunity to minister to the saints in Vancouver Bible-Presbyterian Church (VBPC). As you have known by now, a new pastor and session have been elected. VBPC is in good hands not just because the leaders and members are devoted; it is in good hands because it is God who has established this church, and it is He who will keep and protect it.

The original plan was for Calvary BPC to give support to VBPC until the end of this year and then to gradually reduce our support over the following few years. God willing, VBPC will celebrate the church's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in July this year. Appropriately, at the recent Annual Congregational Meeting (30 March 2008), the VBPC Session announced that it will no longer need the financial support of Calvary BPC. VBPC is now self-supporting, and we praise God for this mark of coming of age for the church. VBPC is now no longer a mission church of Calvary BPC but a daughter church. The financial apron strings are cut but the spiritual ties remain. Calvinians ought to rejoice and to continue to pray for VBPC; that God will continue to bless and to use the church as a channel of blessing on the west coast of Canada.

Since the beginning of the year, we have been considering the disciplines of the believer. So far, we have considered the disciplines of the Christian in worship, prayer, personal devotion, and his worship in the church. One important aspect of Christian discipline in the local church is tithing and giving. They are both a grace and a discipline. It is a discipline because it requires commitment and obedience on the part of the tither. It is a grace because that is how the Bible describes it.

### **Old Testament Teaching on Giving**

Most Christians are familiar with the issue of tithing. A tithe is a tenth of one's income. There are at least three different tithes mentioned in the Old Testament.

**Lord's Tithe:** The purpose of the Lord's tithe was to support the priestly ministry. This is also known as the LORD'S tithe (Lev 27:30). "*Behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation . . . the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer as an heave offering unto the LORD, I have given to the Levites to inherit*" (Num 18:21, 24). It is interesting to note that the Levites themselves are not exempted from the tithe (Num 18:26).

The Lord's tithe is a command. Every Jew had to give. Failure to tithe was tantamount to robbing God – "*Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings*" (Mal 3:8). One man, looking at tithing from God's perspective, puts it this way, "Tithing is not how much of your own resources you want to give to God, but how much of God's resources you want to keep for yourself."

**Festival Tithe:** Besides the Lord's tithe, there was a second tithe meant for religious celebrations and fellowship, commonly known as the Festival Tithe (Deut 12:17-19; 14:22-27). This Festival Tithe was separate from the Lord's Tithe because the latter was entirely reserved for the Levites, whilst the second was to be shared.

**Poor Tithe:** There was another tithe that was collected once every three years. The tithe was used to help the poor, orphans and widows (Deut 14:28-29).

While Christians know about tithing, that knowledge is seldom translated into practice. There are many Christians who take tithing seriously, but by and large, studies have consistently shown that evangelicals do not tithe. One study shows North Americans today are 450% richer in real terms than they were back during the Great Depression (1930's). However, at a time of increasing affluence, evangelicals were giving 2.6% of their income, down from 3.2% back in 1933. Is this also true of us?

### **New Testament Teaching on Giving**

The Old Testament mentioned at least three kinds of tithes, amounting to at least 23% of a person's income, and that is not taking into consideration the various freewill offerings. Mention this figure to any Christian, and the immediate response would be – “but we are living under the covenant of grace, and not the covenant of law.” The question, then, is – how much should a person, under the covenant of grace, give to God? The best teaching on giving as a grace is found in 2 Corinthians 8:1-9. In these few verses, Paul used the word “grace” five times – *the grace of God* (v.1), *the gift*, which is the same word in Greek (v. 4), *the same grace also* (v. 6), *this grace* (v. 7), *the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ* (v. 9).

Paul gave the example of the Macedonian believers as an example of grace giving. They were not rich; in fact, they were in “*deep poverty*” and under “*great trial of affliction*” (v. 2). But Paul said that out of their trials and poverty sprung wells of joy and generosity. The people were giving beyond their means. In fact, they were begging Paul not to limit their giving.

What was the motivation for the Macedonians' sacrificial giving? Answer – “*This they did . . . first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God*” (2 Cor 8:5). The underlying logic behind this principle is simple: When you give yourself to God, then giving a part of your substance is easy. Simply put, grace giving begins when you “*present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God*” (Rom 12:1-2). One old preacher says that the purpose of tithing is to secure not the tithe but the tither, not the gift but the giver, not the possession but the possessor, not your money but you for God.

### **The Discipline of Grace Giving**

The Bible gives us the following instructions on giving. We are to give...

- Faithfully: God has promised to supply all our needs; our giving will not be our lack (Phil 4:19). We can never out give God.
- Purposefully: We are to give from careful and prayerful planning (2 Cor 9:7).
- Regularly – “*the first day of the week*”: Regular giving is disciplined giving (1 Cor 16:2).
- Personally – “*Let every one of you*”: Giving is a personal blessing and responsibility.
- Systematically – “*every one you lay by him in store*”: this emphasizes the need to purposefully set aside a sum of money to be given to the Lord.
- Proportionately – In the New Testament, the tithe has been replaced by the grace principle of voluntary, purposeful, and proportionate giving. The biblical principle for giving today is “*as God hath prospereth*” (1 Cor 16:2).
- Liberally – the Macedonian Christians gave “*beyond their power*” (2 Cor 8:3).
- Cheerfully – giving cannot be forced (2 Cor 9:7).

To whom should you give?

First, to the local church – the local church is the base for the worshipper's outreach, naturally, it should be the first priority of a Christian's giving (Gal 6:6; 1 Tim 5:17-18). Second, Christian organizations and missionaries (3 John 5-8). Third, individuals in need. The Bible makes special provisions for those who are unable to provide for themselves (1 John 3:17; James 2:15-16).

How much should we give?

The word "tithes" is never used in the New Testament as a command or regulation for the church. It is only used in historical occurrences where it pertained to Israel in the Old Testament. In other words, the amount to give is not determined by an external law. Giving for the redeemed is according to the measure of God's blessing – *as God hath prospered* (1 Cor 16:2); and according to the measure of one's grace – *as a man purposeth in his heart* (2 Cor 9:7).

It would be a mistake to conclude from Paul's teaching that there is no fixed amount that we should give to God; or we give God after we have taken out our expenses — God gets our leftovers. From the manner in which some Christians give, it would seem that they are tipping God.

The New Testament teaching on giving is that we must give as much as God has prospered us, and as you have purposed in your heart. The former is motivated by gratitude; the latter requires discipline. The New Testament teaching does not stipulate a specific amount because grace-giving knows no limits.

The Christian is to give according to his resources, his needs, and the needs of others. There are some Christians who are materially blessed. When God blesses you materially, increased prosperity should not result in wasteful spending and wanton living, but in thanksgiving and an increase in giving.

## **Conclusion**

In the end, the reality is that we cannot out give God. He has given us His Son, and with Him comes all the spiritual blessings. No Christian becomes poor because he gives. This is God's promise – *"And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work: (As it is written, He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth for ever. Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness;) Being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God"* (2 Cor 9:8-11).

20 Apr 08

Thank God for your prayers during my time of travel. It was good to minister to the Vancouver Bible-Presbyterian Church over the last three Lord's Day. The church is holding firmly to the Word of God in a place where the churches are embracing instead of evangelizing the world, and at a time when biblical truth and standards are not popular. Pray for VBPC, Pastor Colin Wong and the new session in their ministry.

It is different seeing the work from the outside as a visiting minister. The perspective is different. However, it is a blessing because what I have seen reaffirms in my mind what I have learned from the Bible, that the work of the Lord is not the work of one man. It is the work of God's people. It also reaffirms the truth that no man is indispensable in God's work. There is one who sows, and another who labours, but the Scripture reminds us that *"neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase"* (1 Cor 3:7). God's servants are not indispensable; we should not pretend that we are, and God forbid that we should make ourselves to be. I take to heart the wise counsel of an old Christian friend – "We must never outlive our usefulness for God."

The wise preacher tells us *"To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven...a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted...a time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away...He hath made every thing beautiful in his time"* (Eccl 3:1, 2, 6, 11). My time in VBPC is done, and it is time to move on for God.

In the run up to our church's Annual Congregational Meeting and Election of Session, I have used this space to consider the aspiration, position, motivation, and qualifications of church leaders. Today, I want to turn the tables around and focus on all of us who have the grave responsibility of choosing leaders of the church. Here again, we see the paradox of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. It is God who appoints, but as members of the church, we have the responsibility to choose; and we ought to take this triennial exercise seriously. We ought to choose prayerfully and wisely.

### **Choose Your Leaders Wisely**

There is a huge difference between the election of the church session members, and that of politicians running for public offices. That difference is most evident in the current US presidential elections, the goings on of which we read in the newspapers and watch on television news. In that race for the White House, two or more people vie for the same office, and the one who gets the most votes wins. To ensure victory, hundreds of millions of dollars are spent on campaigning. In the attempt to promote one's favourite and to demote his enemy, there is no compunction whatsoever in the spreading of malicious half-truths and even outright lies. No tactic is too heinous, and no strategy unethical if it can bring about the destruction of the name and character of one's opponents.

This kind of unchristian power struggle has no place in the church. The disciples also fought amongst themselves as to who should be the first in line after our Lord Jesus. He set them straight with this rebuke, *"The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth"* (Luke 22:25-27).

Christian leaders ought not to behave like the worldly leaders. The one who aspires to be the greatest is the one who ought to be the servant of all. This is the principle of servant-leadership. The Bible reminds us that to be elected into the session is not an election to an office of status; rather it is an election to an office of service. Paul told Timothy, *"If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work"* (1 Tim 3:1). The leader is one who desires a good work, not a good status, not a good title, not to be served, but to serve.

To the members of the church who have the responsibility to elect, I say this: the first quality that you should be looking for in a session member is one who has the heart and attitude of a servant. To be sure, the church needs people who are competent because the work of the Gospel is good work, and good work requires the best of men and women. But even competence is a poor second to Christian conduct. Hence, dearly beloved, choose wisely.

### **Pray for Your Leaders Fervently**

When you cast your vote for a person, your responsibility does not end there. It is merely the beginning of a collaborative relationship. The Apostle Paul made this request of the Thessalonians, *“Brethren, pray for us”* (1 Thess 5:25); *“Brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you: And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith”* (2 Thess 3:1-2).

Even the Apostle Paul recognized that he was a man of like passions. He was susceptible to the same temptations of the flesh. He was not immune to errors of judgement. Paul never claimed infallibility. He was liable to all human follies such as pride and discouragement. There was a thorn in his flesh lest he *“should be exalted above measure”* (2 Cor 12:7). Paul who penned thirteen epistles never advertised himself to be the most spiritual of all. Here is what he says about himself: He was a wretched man of the flesh (Rom 7:24). He was *“the least of the apostles”* (1 Cor 15:9). And he was the chief of sinners (1 Tim 1:15).

*“Brethren, pray for us.”* Charles Spurgeon made the same request of his congregation, *“Brethren, our work is solemnly momentous, involving weal or woe to thousands; we treat with souls for God on eternal business, and our word is either a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death. A very heavy responsibility rests upon us...We wish to profit you by our preaching; we desire to be blest to your children; we long to be useful both to saints and sinners; therefore, dear friends, intercede for us with our God.”* As members of the church, you have the responsibility to pray for the Session members.

### **Work with Your Leaders Faithfully**

The act of electing is **not** assigning other people to labour for God. The act of electing is assigning yourself to those people with whom you will co-labour in the Gospel ministry in Calvary B-P Church. Your responsibility does not end with marking an X against a person's name. On the contrary, your responsibility begins from there. The election of the church session is the key that opens the door into a field white unto harvest.

Paul, in several of his epistles, describes the church as a body. *“For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us...”* (Rom 12:4-6). Paul went on to say that we should use our individual and unique gifts to serve God.

In Ephesians 4, Paul gave a similar exhortation: *“Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ...For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ”* (Eph 4:7-13). The Apostle Peter adds, *“As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God”* (1 Pet 4:10).

The work of a church is a ministry of the people who go to that church. What we get out of the church depends on what we put in. Every member of the church is to be a minister. So when the election is over (26 April), and a new session installed (God willing on 4 May 2008), it is also the time to roll up our sleeves, unite our hearts and minds, and co-labour with the new session faithfully. May the Lord help us!

27 Apr 08  
The discipline of work

One worker was overheard saying, "I love my work so much that I could spend hours looking at it." Work! To some people this is one of those necessary evils of life. When someone told Herman Melville – the author of *Moby Dick* – about the dignity of work, he retorted, "Dignity of work? The dignity is in leisure."

Melville falls into the category of people who do not like work. I am sure in any company or business organisation, there are workers who do not like their work, and they are lazy. At the other extreme, there are workaholics who stayed late in the office, bring work home for the weekend. To such a person, the work is life. Sadly, there are many Christians who adopt the same unhealthy and unbiblical work attitudes, and they swing between the two extremes – sloth and overwork. What then are the biblical attitudes of work? Here is what the Bible says.

### **God is a Worker**

God is a worker! This is the first thing we notice about God. In the first two chapters of Genesis, we know God as the planner, designer, developer and Creator. When He was done, He said that the work was "very good" (Gen 1:31). The creation was as good as God Himself.

Lest we think that God's work cease at creation, our Lord Jesus said, "*My Father worketh hitherto, and I work*" (John 5:17). God continues to sustain His creation and provides for His creatures. Above all, God continues His work of saving souls. Through it all, God was glorified by His own work (Isa 60:21).

### **God Ordained Work**

That God is a worker tells us that work itself is inherently good since God can only do that which is good. Not only is God a worker, but He also made man to be one as well – "*The LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it*" (Gen 2:15). Adam was given the work to keep the garden of Eden. God ordained work to be an essential part of man's life.

This means God has endowed all legitimate work with an intrinsic dignity. It also means that man best reflects the nature of God when he works. And he reflects that divine nature best when he gives his utmost to whatever he does.

### **Sin Destroyed the Joy of Work**

The nature of work changed when Adam disobeyed God – "*And unto Adam [God] said...cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground*" (Gen 3:17-19).

God did not curse work. Even after the fall, God still commends work. He called Noah to the same kind of work as Adam (Gen 9:1-7). However, sin did have an effect on the nature of work. Like the whole of creation, sin cast a dark pall upon work.

From the time of the fall, work shall be a struggle. Work loses its joy, and it became a toil. Man's work will be hindered by "thorns and thistles." He would have to "sweat" to accomplish his tasks. After the fall, work is fraught with disappointing setbacks, pressing deadlines, endless routines, mounting frustrations, and to cap it all, Solomon tells us that all work comes to a



meaningless end – “*Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun*” (Eccl 2:11-17).

## **Work Redeemed**

How then is work different for the Christian? Man’s perspective on work changes when he puts God at the centre of his life. When a person is saved, God does not remove the curse of sorrows and sweat that comes with work, but He does restore the dignity and the meaningfulness of work. In the New Testament, Christians are commanded to work. Paul reminds us that we are God’s workmanship, “*created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*” He also exhorts every believer to “*labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth*” (Eph 4:28).

God, through the work of His Son, redeemed work. In Christ, every man’s work has meaning and purpose. Every honest work has dignity. The practical implications of this truth should radically change the way every Christian looks and does his work.

## **The Redeemed Man and His Work**

*Your work matters to God.* To those people who are looking for the perfect job, the hard reality is that there is no perfect job in this imperfect world. Every honest work is important. Every honest work matters to God.

This is not to say that there will be no unreasonable bosses, difficult clients, and dishonest partners. How we react to trying circumstances in our work is a reflection of our faith in Christ. So the question is not what work is more honourable, but which worker is faithful.

Take Joseph as an example. He was a slave in Potiphar’s house. He was a convict in the prison. He was the Prime Minister of Egypt. At every station in his life, regardless of the nature of his work, and how he was treated, Joseph was an honest and faithful worker. What was his motivation? Joseph took his work – whether as a slave or premier – as God’s calling for him. In the same way, as a Christian, you should take your present work as God’s calling for your life.

*All work is sacred.* There is no such thing as “secular” or “sacred” work. To be sure, there are people who are called to be preachers and missionaries, but it would be wrong to regard them as the only people who are doing God’s work. Every honest work is sacred because the Person to whom we are ultimately accountable is not our employer but God.

God calls some to be doctors, some nurses, others to be homemakers. There is value and worth in every honest work because every worker is used of God to carry out His will in this world. It will do well to remember that we are first and foremost defined by who we are in Christ and then by what we do in life. In other words, you are a Christian first, then a businessman; a Christian first, then an engineer; a Christian first, then....

*Labour in the Name of our Lord Jesus.* Every God-fearing Christian must do his work in a manner that honours God. I remember as a young Christian spending part of my Saturday evening folding the church weekly and stamping the church address on Gospel tracts. Some of us regard these as small and insignificant jobs. But the pastor then reminded us that every weekly must be folded and every tract must be stamped just right. Why? First, God must be pleased with our work. Just as important, we do all in the name of our Lord Jesus – “*Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him*” (Col 3:17).

God saw His work, and it was very good. What would God say when He sees our work which we claim was done in His name? What would He say when we are called to give an account before Him? Will He describe us as “wicked and slothful” or will He say, “*Well done, thou good and faithful servant . . . enter thou into the joy of thy lord*” (Matt 25:21).

04 May 08  
Discipline of ministry

Praise God for the orderliness of our Annual Congregational Meeting and Session Election. Every page in the Annual Report is a testimony of God's goodness upon Calvary Jurong. As we serve our Saviour, we must remember Paul's words to the Corinthians, "*neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase*" (1 Cor 3:7).

In the church, there are many who sowed and watered silently. And God, by His sovereign will, allows another to reap. There are many who laboured behind the scenes quietly and unnoticed, so it seems. Others take a more visible role. Again, the Apostle Paul puts our service in perspective, "*Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God...But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon*" (1 Cor 3:8-10).

Let every man take heed how he builds. There is not just only the command to build but to build wisely, cautiously and diligently. The servant of God must be disciplined in his ministry. Sloth and service are diametrically opposed.

### **Deaf, Blind and Shrivelling Heart**

Our Lord Jesus is the best example of one who is disciplined in ministry – He "*came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many*" (Mark 10:45). Our Lord gave of Himself. Did our Lord suffer disappointments? Was His kindness appreciated?

The Bible says that "*He came unto His own, and His own received Him not*" (John 1:11). Our Lord Himself also said, "*The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head*" (Matt 8:20). Multitudes were fed by Him, and yet they turned their backs on Him and walked no more with our Saviour (John 6:66). Did the setbacks stop Him? Did He give up?

If you do not want to be disappointed, the best advice I can give you is – do not get involved in anything or with anyone. Do not attempt anything, and there will be no opportunities for failure. Do not give of yourself, and you will escape the afflictions that are part and parcel of meaningful living.

One writer said that if you cultivate deafness, you never hear the discords of life; if you cultivate blindness, you will be shielded from all of life's ugliness. Do as the three proverbial monkeys did, cover the eyes, plug the ears, zip the mouth. The inevitability, however, is that your heart also gets smaller.

As Christians, we like to think that we have a ministering heart, but if you are not ministering for the Gospel in the place that God has placed you, if you are not inconvenienced by your commitment, if you never extend beyond yourself to give to others, if you are always thinking of reasons to do less, your heart is shrivelling too.

### **Scars, Pains and Ministering Heart**

Daily, we read in the newspapers of people who perished in accidents, disasters, calamities, and wars. Amongst ourselves, we know of people who are burdened with struggles. The man with the shrivelled heart would retire to his soft bed, crawl under the warm sheets, and thanked God that he was not living in those places, and that he is healthy and sane.

But the Bible wants us to do more; we are commanded to minister to others. “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal 6:10). “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27).

The Word of God commands us to avail ourselves to do good. As you open yourself to serve others, you are also at the same time cultivating your own heart. Of course, you are then susceptible to sorrows; you become vulnerable to hurts and scars. The Apostle Paul says “I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus” (Gal 6:17); but what are scars of ministry compared to a shrivelled heart and a self-centred life?

### **Serve or Shivel?**

The choices are as different as day from night. Cultivate deafness and you will never hear the Good News of salvation; you will never know of the opportunities to serve our Lord. Cultivate blindness and you will never see that the fields are white unto harvest; you will never see the needs of your neighbour. Cultivate a small heart, and you will never open yourself to embrace and empathise with those in need. One thing is certain, the man whose only desire is to live in ease will never live to glorify God.

It has been said that the world is run by a few tired people. It is the same in the church. Fatigue is one reason that many people use for not wanting to serve God and minister to others. But consider this: What if, on Sunday morning, the preacher is fatigued (he had a busy week) and decides not to show up for worship service? This scenario is quite unthinkable, yet there are many able-bodied Christians who take Lord’s Day worship service as a leisure activity, something they do if they have the time, and when they are not too tired.

In every church, there is a core group of people who are willing to stand up and serve beyond themselves. It is not that these people have nothing to do, or that they have more time, or that they have more energy; but because they are willing to extend themselves, enlarge their hearts, and embrace the needs of others even when they are tired to the bones. I know that there are many in our midst, and I thank God for you.

Our Lord Jesus was rejected, had no place to rest, and gave of His life. Paul bore the marks of the Gospel ministry. How far would you go to serve Christ? May our Lord give us a ministering heart of humble service, and by His grace, bear the scars that go with it.

11 May 08

Today we witness the installation of the Session for the English Congregation. The Session for the Chinese Congregation was installed last Lord's Day. The combined Session has 8 elders, 14 deacons, and 3 deaconesses. We praise the Lord for this group of men and women who are willing to give of their time and resources to lead and to serve. Get to know them, and if you need help in whatever way, please do not hesitate to approach the Session members. Please continue to pray for the Session that the Lord will grant us wisdom as we serve Him and the church.

In the coming months, there will be several church events. On 19 May, which is a public holiday, is our Church Family Day. Deacon Kenny Neo and his team have been busy organizing the event. So please plan to come and have a time of fellowship together. Then during the June school holidays, we will have our Annual Church Camp. We thank God for the overwhelming response. Please continue to pray for Deacon Peter Goh and his committee as they make the final preparations for the Camp. Remember also the various Camp speakers in prayer that the preaching of His Word will bear much fruit and bring about true evangelical repentance and revival to our hearts and our church.

### **Mothers are God's Gifts**

Today, the world and our culture celebrate Mother's Day. Some years ago, while I was visiting a friend in West Virginia, I went to the church where Mother's Day all started. It was an event started by the church to recognize the role of mothers in the home. Mothers are a precious gift from God. In Proverbs 31, we find a full portrait of the godly mother. She is the woman whose "children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all" (Prov 31:28-29).

She is the woman whose sense of worth comes not from where she wears on the outside. She recognizes that "Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised" (Prov 31:30). What then are the various facets of this woman whose "price is far above rubies" (Prov 31:10).

### **She is Gracious**

A godly mother is one who is always mindful of the needs of her family. Her husband will "safely trust in her...and she will do him good and not evil all the days of her life" (Prov 31:11). This is the key to blessed marriage — doing our spouse good and not evil. This principle is applicable to the men as well; when a husband and a wife endeavour to do good to one another, the family union is most blessed.

A godly mother is also gracious in that "she looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness" (Prov 31:27). The love of a mother is seen in that she is actively concerned about the well being of her family. Her children are fed and clothed, and most importantly nurtured in the ways of our Lord.

The graciousness of a godly mother also extends beyond her immediate family, "She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy" (Prov 31:20). The graciousness of a godly mother is like a cup that runs over with the fragrance of her love. Her sweetness permeates every room that she occupies. Her graciousness touches everyone whom she meets, so that the love of Christ through her life is clearly seen.

### **She is Wise**

The godly mother is wise. A godly mother “considereth a field, and buyeth it” (Prov 31:16); she “perceiveth that her merchandise is good” (Prov 31:18). A wise mother will be able to choose not just between good and bad, which in most cases is not difficult; but she is also able to choose from among the good what is best, which requires much wisdom and discernment.

### **She is Diligent**

Wisdom without diligence makes a knowledgeable idler. Diligence without intelligence renders a person a foolish plodder. But when wisdom is coupled with intelligence, it makes for an effective servant for God, and the godly mother is one who not only knows what is a good field, but she also works on it.

“She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands...she bringeth her food from afar.... she riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household...she layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff...she is not afraid of the snow for her household” (Prov 31:13-21).

### **She is Faithful**

A godly mother is faithful to her husband (Prov 31:11). Her husband trusts her, knowing she will manage the household well. Her children trust her, knowing that they will be provided for (Prov 31:27). The godly mother is also faithful to God (Prov 31:30).

Faithfulness is one of the most important qualities to God. A person’s faithfulness is seen not just in the big things but also in the small and insignificant events of life. You can be sure that the mother who is faithful in the small things will also be faithful in the more important things.

What could be more precious than the people that God has sent into our lives? What could be more important than the spiritual well-being of our children and family? God does not demand that every Christian be equally fruitful. There will be some who will a hundredfold, some who reap only sixty, and others even less, but God does require every Christian to be faithful (1 Cor 4:2).

### **She is Kind and Compassionate**

The godly mother is an amalgam of strength and compassion. First, she is known for her strength and fortitude — “she girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms” (Prov 31:17). She is known for her industry – “she is not afraid of the snow for her household” (Prov 31:21). She is known for her strength (Prov 31:25). But the strength is employed for the service of others and for the glory of God, never in the pursuit of self-interests.

The godly woman is also known for her compassion and tenderness. She “giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens...she stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy” (Prov 31:15, 20). Her compassion is seen in her deeds as well as her words – “she openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness” (Prov 31:26). The godly mother is one who has made compassion and kindness her guiding principle for her life.

In these days of the liberated women, many have devoted themselves to the pursuit of their careers at the expense of the welfare of their children. Many women fought to be freed from the fetters of nurturing the family to pursue their careers, but only to find themselves trapped and enslaved to a titled and salaried position.

Many more juggled between the two – career and family – only to find that, in most cases, such an arrangement is really an unhappy and unfulfilling compromise. Consider this – if a mother is incapacitated in her job, her employers will have no problem finding a replacement for her position, but can her family easily find a mother/wife to replace her?

The question is not whether every wife and mother wants to do her best for her husband and children; the real question is this – is the ministry in the home worth the investment of your life? Consider these words from Susanna Wesley, mother of Charles and John Wesley and their 17 siblings. She wrote, “No one can, without renouncing the world, in the most literal sense, observe my method; and there are few, if any, that would entirely devote above 20 years of the prime of life in hopes to save the souls of their children, which they think may be saved without so much ado; for that was my principal intention.”

So whether it is just one child or nineteen children, a godly mother is one who first and foremost is wholly consecrated to God. To the children and husbands, if the godly mother is priceless in the eyes of God, how much more must we honour them – “Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her” (Prov 31:28).

18 May 08

Our church has been blessed with several weddings, and will be blessed with several more in the months ahead. It is always good to see young people coming together to start a family because the home is where the seed of the church is nourished and nurtured. The spiritual state of the Christian family is reflected in the state of the church. For the Holy Ghost to bring about a revival in the church, there must first be the renewal of the Christian (mind, devotion, prayer and worship), and the renewal of the family (marriage and parenting).

Our marriage vow says that the husband and the wife must stay together “for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, till death do us part.” Marriage demands a commitment for life. However some time ago, the *New York Times* reported that one pastor in New York City was asked by a couple getting married if he would make a change to the matrimonial vows. They wanted to replace “till death do us part” to “as long as our love shall last.” Their reason for the change was simply that it was unrealistic to expect them to make a life-time vow when they were still in their mid-twenties. This is the state of the family and marriage today.

Dr. Robertson McQuilkin, Bible expositor, was the president of Columbia Bible College when his wife was diagnosed with the dreaded Alzheimer’s disease. Shortly, Dr. McQuilkin resigned from the post to take care of his wife. He was advised by well-meaning friends to put his wife into an institution, but he could not. In *A Promise Kept*, the book that chronicles his journey with his wife, he gave the reason for his resignation, “The decision was made, in a way, 42 years ago when I promised to care for Muriel ‘in sickness and in health . . . till death do us part.’ . . . She has cared for me fully and sacrificially all these years; if I cared for her the next 40 years I would not be out of debt. Duty, however, can be grim and stoic. But there is more; I love Muriel...I do not have to care for her; I get to! It is a high honour to care for so wonderful a person.” Such is the kind of marriage that is described in the Bible as “one flesh.”

### **The Discipline of Sacrifice**

“One flesh” marriage requires a sacrificial love. “*Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it*” (Eph 5:25). The onus is on the husband. Husbands are commanded to love our wives even to the extent of death.

The husband who does not understand the extent to which he must love his wife has not fully appreciated the real meaning of marital love. To some men, marriage is a natural second step to falling in love; the Bible says that marriage is a call to die. To the women who have the same emotive ideas, the Word of God says that marriage is a call to submission (Eph 5:22). In both cases, it is the sacrifice of the self for the other. Furthermore, it is not just the sacrifice of one’s possessions but of one’s person. Marriage is not just sharing all that you have; it is sacrificing all that you are.

A man’s life in exchange for his wife’s is of course the ultimate sacrifice of the husband. But before a man can get to the point where he gives of his own body to die, there is the death of his rights, his time, his pursuits, his hobbies, his night-outs with his buddies.

Dr. McQuilkin wrote that his wife’s condition had changed his routine and ministry. He was, in a sense, chained himself to his wife. He cut back on what he desires so that he could fulfill Muriel’s. However, he wrote that, “As Muriel became ever more dependent on me, our love seeped to deeper, unknown crevices of the heart...My ‘imprisonment’ turned out to be a delightful liberation to love more fully than I had ever known. We found the chains of confining circumstance to be, not instruments of torture, but bonds to hold us closer.” Dr. McQuilkin suffered with his wife; he shared her loss, experienced her fears, appreciated her anxieties, and more. That is the discipline of sacrificial love in a marriage.



## **The Discipline of Sanctification**

Our Lord Jesus did not just sacrifice Himself for the church, but He also sanctified it so that the church will be a glorious one, a true reflection of His eternal glory (Eph 5:26-27). Husbands are exhorted to manifest similar love towards his wife. The marital union is to have a sanctifying effect on the people involved. Speaking of unequally yoked unions, Paul said, "*The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband*" (1 Cor 7:14); if that is God's instruction to believers with unbelieving spouses, how much more must a believing husband and wife sanctify one another.

In the pristine state of Eden, God made a woman out of Adam's rib to be a "*help meet for him*" (Gen 2:18). Adam, in his yet still undefiled mind, expressed that marriage principle, "*Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh*" (Gen 2:24).

This principle did not change with the fall. Notwithstanding the fact that God has called some to be single, the divine plan is that the wholeness of a man and woman is found in a marital union. The purpose for such a union is sanctification; the husband and wife encouraging one another to greater depths of love for God, and greater heights of service for Him. The question that every married person has to ask is this – "Is my wife/husband more like Christ because she/he is married to me?"

## **The Discipline of Selflessness**

In Greek mythology, there was a man called Narcissus who fell in love with his own reflection. Narcissism is the act of self-love, which pervades in this age. Sadly, there are preachers who teach it is impossible for a man to love his wife without loving himself first. They based this idea on Ephesians 5:28-29, "*So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church.*"

The proper understanding of this portion of Scripture, however, is exactly the opposite. Being one in the flesh, the husband is to take the same amount of care for his wife as he would his own body. He needs to rest; he should also see to it that she rests too. He keeps himself warm; he should also see that she is warm too. The point is that whatever he sees as needful for himself, he should also see to it that his wife's needs are met.

The picture selfless love is seen in the words of our Saviour to Saul when he was persecuting the church. Our Lord asked, "*Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?*" (Acts 9:4). Saul did not directly persecute Christ; he persecuted the church. But because Christ and the church are intimately related, Saul could not do what he did to the church without also hurting Christ.

As one author puts it, the biblical one-flesh marriage is "an exchange of soul – a mutual appropriation of each other's lives." For we must recognize that there is no other human union that affords two persons with so much sameness – the same children, the same future, the same destiny, and the same Lord. May God bless your family for His glory.

25 May 08  
The discipline of parenting

We thank God for the various activities that took place over the last week – AWANA outing at Pasir Ris Park, the Mandarin YF/YAF Leader's Retreat, Church Family Day at West Coast Park, Hokkien Fellowship Retreat. I would like to acknowledge the leadership and hard work put in by those who organised these activities for our spiritual benefit.

In a couple of weeks, our church will head up to Kuantan for our Annual Bible Camp. Praise God for the overwhelming response, with nearly 200 rooms taken up. Again, a word of appreciation for the Camp Committee headed up by Dn Peter Goh. Please pray for the various camp speakers: Rev (Dr) Timothy Ki, Rev David Wong, Preacher Jonathan Yeo and myself. Pray also for yourself that God will be pleased to send a spiritual refreshing to us.

### **God Works Through the Family**

How does God measure success in a man? Certainly not by a man's wealth or worldly accomplishments. God judges a man by his faithfulness – faithfulness in his various roles as a steward of God's manifold grace. One of the most important roles in a Christian's life is that of being a parent. Children are God's blessings. "Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward" (Ps 127:3).

All God-fearing parents know the grave responsibility of raising children. A friend said to me some time ago that life is like juggling. Every one of us has several balls to handle at the same time. The balls represent your various responsibilities and priorities – career, leisure, friends, church, and of course your family. The key is to ensure that in juggling the various responsibilities, you do not drop any of the balls, especially the one that represents your family. The reason is that the rest of the balls are made of rubber; you lose a job, you can get a new one. But the ball that represents the family is made of glass; you lose your children, you can't get them back.

God's eternal plan has always been to work through the family. The family was the building block of the nation of Israel. God chose Abraham and told him, "in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen 12:3). Likewise, the family is also the building block of the church.

God chose Abraham by His own sovereign and perfect will, but we also know that Abraham was faithful. "For I [God] know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him" (Gen 18:19). In other words, God knew that Abraham would be a godly father.

When we understand God's purpose for the family, then we will also understand the seriousness with which we should embrace this responsibility. In our age, it seems that it is the mother who bears the heavier load of parenting. In families where both parents work, parenting is left to a nanny or grandparents, or institutionalized childcare. Biblically, parenting is a shared responsibility of the parents with the father taking the lead.

For this reason, the father is endowed with the power. The direction you set, the life you live, the example you show with regard to your attitude toward authority, toward your wife, toward God and the church, will make a whole world of difference in how your children will turn out.

There is no job that requires more patience and work than being a parent. Yet there is no job that gives more satisfaction and brings more blessing – if you do it God's way, of course.

## **Do Not's of Parenting**

The Bible gives this warning to parents, and specifically the father, "Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph 6:4). The admonition is clear as day. Fathers (parents), do not push your children to a point where they would react to you in anger.

**Disparagement:** Top on the list of provoking your children is to disparage their person and their abilities. I have seen parents who excoriate their children by their hurtful remarks because they did not do well in a test or a competition. Disparagement can also take the form of a disguised praise or a sarcastic tone. "Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged" (Col 3:21). The word "discouraged" literally means "to be left spiritless."

**Sternness:** Some parents provoke their children by being overly stern; fathers who are dictators in the home; parents who treat the Bible as a morality manual and the church as a correction centre. The danger of unreasonably strict Christian parents is that the children will see Christian faith is merely conforming to external behaviour and not as a transforming of the heart.

Parents should not use the Word of God as a law to bind the children; rather they should teach and train the children to embrace God's Truth as their very own.

**Inconsistency:** "Do as I say, do not do as I do." There is nothing more destructive to the spiritual growth of children than for parents to have two sets of rules – one for themselves, and another for their children. What height of hypocrisy and incalculable damage it is for the children to see that their parents live two distinct lives – one in the church, and another outside the church.

## **Do's of Parenting**

Children naturally look up to the parents. This should remind us of our responsibility. Paul says that parents are to "bring [the children] up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph 6:4).

**Nourish:** Parents are to "bring up" their children, meaning to "nourish" (Eph 5:29). The idea is to treat the children with tenderness and gentleness. The story was told of Benjamin West – the well known English history painter. One time, as a young boy Benjamin found some bottles of coloured ink and began to paint a portrait of his sister. However, Benjamin made a mess of the room; ink splatters were found all over the furniture. When his mother came back, she was upset with the mess until she saw the picture, and she exclaimed, "Why, it's Sally!" And she bent down and kissed her young son. When Benjamin West became the royal painter of King George III, he was asked what motivated him to paint; he replied, "My mother's kiss made me a painter." Her encouragement did far more than a rebuke ever could have done. As Christian parents, we will do well to see to value our children and cherish them as gifts from God.

**Nurture:** The same word is translated "chastening" in Hebrews 12:5. Discipline means to give direction, and when our children stray from those directions, they have to be held accountable. The problem is that parents do the latter without first providing the former. One of the greatest failure of parents today is the neglect of biblical discipline. As parents, we do not set biblical guidelines; we shift our moral markers for the sake of convenience. We describe misbehaving children as cute, and defiant teenagers as going through a phase. And we wonder why our children are defiant. Parents have to nurture their children through biblical discipline.

**Admonish:** The word means "to place before the mind." It has the idea of direct instruction. Do you know what your children are doing for their Quiet Time? Do you know what they learn in

Sunday School or Awana Club? Do you talk about spiritual things with them? Is your life an example?

### **Shine in the Home**

I shall never forget the time when I was caught up in my work. I had no time for Anna-Joy, who was then just over four years old. And I thought that I could send her away with some paper and crayons. But she came back to me with this simple request, "Daddy, can I just sit here with you?" Her words jolted me out of my self-centredness.

Parenting cannot be done by proxy. It is either you are present or you are not. There can be no substitutes. Be present for your children. Be genuine in your walk with the Lord. Be prayerful. Be fervent in the Lord's service. As the saying goes, "The light that shines farthest shines brightest at home."

01 Jun 08

We are already into the second half of 2008. The cliché that “time flies” seems to be dated in this age in which processing speed of computers is measured in nano-seconds. Time no longer flies; it flashes by. The Word of God has a great deal to say about the swiftness of passing time and the consequent shortness of our life.

*“For what is a man’s life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away”* (James 4:14). His days are *“as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more”* (Ps 103:15-16). So our Lord tells us *“to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom”* (Ps 90:12); to *“walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil”* (Eph 5:15-16).

Next week, some of us will have the blessing of sitting under the sound of the Gospel for a whole week. That is in a sense redeeming the time. But for those who could not join us, you too can redeem the time by being faithful to what God has called you to do.

### **The Discipline of Friendship (Part I)**

Since we are on the topic of time, I remember a time when Singapore was just a tropical island, where things and people were much simpler. I remember growing up in a *kampong*, where doors were never locked, neighbours always cooked a little extra to share with others, and the children addressed every adult outside the family either as “uncle” or “auntie.” Then in the name of progress and development, we moved from the *kampong* into a high-rise apartment, every home had a gate and window grills for safety and security reasons. However, that inadvertently had an adverse effect on good neighbourliness and the cultivation of deep and lasting friendship.

Today, the lives of most people reflect that attitude of individualism and isolation. Only we called it “privacy.” It was said that the average family moves four times, not counting those relocations that come with job changes. People move from place to place looking for that special something. While that thing remains elusive, but what they end up is a family that has little continuity and no lasting roots in a community. That is also the case with people who move from church to church, looking for that perfect one.

### **Not Good to be Alone**

God who has created us understands our make-up. He said, *“It is not good that the man should be alone”* (Gen 2:18). In the context, God was specifically referring to the relationship between a husband and his wife. The relationship between the husband and wife should be the first and deepest of all friendships.

From that text, we can also derive that God intended for man to live in a society. The church (*ekklesia*), by its very definition, is a body of believers, implying of course that Christians are to live in a community. Our Lord Jesus in His ministry on earth took pains to develop friendships – “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends” (John 15:13-14).

In his writings, the Apostle Paul revealed that he not only made converts in his missionary trips, but that he also left a trail of friends all across Europe – Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25-30), Philemon (Phile 17-19), Onesimus, and Aristarchus (Col 4:9-10), Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18). Of course, Paul himself was a good friend, as evidenced by his words to Christians in Thessalonica, *“So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us”* (1 Thess 2:8).

### **True Friendship**

The 17<sup>th</sup> century Anglican bishop, Jeremy Taylor describes friendship as “the greatest love, the greatest usefulness, the most open communication, the noblest sufferings, the severest truth, the

heartiest counsel, and the greatest union of minds.” We will look at this discipline of friendship in the persons of David and Jonathan.

**Union of minds:** We see these qualities exhibited in the life of Jonathan and his friendship with David. Jonathan was a son of King Saul, and a hero in his own right. When his father cowered under the threat of the Philistines, Jonathan said to his armour-bearer, “*Come, and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised: it may be that the LORD will work for us: for there is no restraint to the LORD to save by many or by few*” (1 Sam 14:6). It was an act of faith, and God honoured that faith.

Years later, another young man said to the Philistine giant, “*I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts. . . this day will the LORD deliver thee into mine hand. . . And all this assembly shall know that the LORD saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the LORD'S, and he will give you into our hands*” (1 Sam 17:45-47).

When Jonathan heard those words, there was an immediate union of the minds and hearts; Jonathan had found a friend. In 1 Samuel 18:1, we read that “*the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul*” (1 Samuel 18:1).

Here were two men whose hearts beat as one. This is fundamental to a deep friendship. They worshipped the same God. They shared the same values. They had the same perspective on life. This is not to say that good friends think alike on everything, but that they never second-guess one another. A good friend will never doubt his friend's intention, nor will he say or do anything that will give his friend a reason to doubt his.

**The greatest of love:** As evidence of his love and commitment to the friendship, Jonathan gave David his robe, his clothes, his sword, his bow and girdle (1 Sam 18:4). Jonathan's gift was not a small gesture. The prince and heir to the throne of Israel divested his honour and position so that a shepherd boy from Bethlehem could be king. This speaks of Jonathan's humility and magnanimity. In putting his princely robe over David, Jonathan conferred royalty on his friend.

Jonathan's act came after David had been anointed by Samuel to be the next king of Israel (1 Sam 16:12-13). Whether or not Jonathan knew of the anointing of David, there was no doubt that Jonathan loved David enough to help him be what God had purposed for David. The lesson of true friendship is to love another enough to help him live up to the fullest potential that God has intended for him.

**The greatest commitment:** How much do you value your friendship? To Jonathan, it was the price of a kingdom and more. Saul reminded his son of David's threat, “*As long as the son of Jesse liveth upon the ground, thou [Jonathan] shalt not be established, nor thy kingdom.*” (1 Sam 20:31). But Jonathan knew the kind of friend he should be – loyal and whole-hearted commitment.

**The heartiest counsel:** There is a saying that a true friend is the one who comes in when the whole world has gone out. David went through some disappointing times when Saul was king. Saul was on a murderous rage and had tried to kill David on several occasions. David was forced to flee into the wilderness, but Jonathan “*went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God*” (1 Sam 23:16). Jonathan came to David in his hour of need and comforted him. Jonathan truly is the friend who “*loveth at all times*” (Prov 17:17a).

Jonathan's friendship was not given in vain. David treasured Jonathan. At the death of Jonathan, David's grieving words revealed his deep devotion to Jonathan, “*How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! O Jonathan, thou wast slain in thine high places. I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!*” (2 Sam 1:25-27).

Only the wicked can take this passage of scripture and twist to justify the abomination of homosexuality. They have not only perverted the Scripture, but they have also poisoned the very pristine nature of true friendship. There is absolutely no fleshly sensuality in the friendship between Jonathan and David. David's grieving words must be taken in context. In his friendship with Jonathan, David had known the deepest commitment, the union of the heart and soul, and the greatest *agape* love – experiences of which David had never known in his other relationships.

The friendship between Jonathan and David reveals what real friends ought to do. It also tells us of the potential of our friendships. True and satisfying friendship does not come overnight; like all worthy things in life, true friendship takes hard work, commitment, and sacrifice. May our Lord help us to be a true friend like Jonathan.

08 Jun 08

We welcome to our pulpit, the Reverend (Dr) Timothy Ki. We thank the Lord for the ministry of His servant. Pastor Ki will be ministering to us over the next one week during the Bible Camp. As we head north to Kuantan, please remember to pray for (1) the Lord's messengers from the English and Chinese congregations; (2) journeying mercies; (3) safety and good health for the campers; and (4) God's blessings that He may visit us with spiritual refreshing.

### **The Discipline of Friendship (II)**

Last Lord's Day, we look at the lives of Jonathan and David, and we see in these two men, the true mark of friendship. As I study the lives of David and Jonathan, several questions come to my mind: How can we have this kind of friendship? Where does it begin? When does it take root, what can we do to keep it going?

The wise preacher gives this advice – "*A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother*" (Prov 18:24). All human relationships function according to the laws of nature – you reap what you sow. The Roman playwright, Seneca, wrote, "If you wish to gain affection, bestow it." The irony about friendship is that it is one of those things in life that increases as you give it away.

Friendship is a hard thing, and rightly so; anything that is of eternal worth deserves our whole-hearted commitment. Friendship makes us vulnerable, and it should be because it requires us to open ourselves to others. There will be people who will take advantage of our kindness and compassion. Friendship requires sacrifice, and undoubtedly so because the depth of friendship demands that we give of ourselves unreservedly.

Despite the sacrifices and vulnerabilities, Solomon recommends friendship to us, and he also exhorts us to cultivate friendship. To do that, we must show ourselves friendly. In other words, the nature of friendship really depends on you.

The story was told of an old farmer sitting on his porch when a car drove up. The driver hollered from his car, "We are moving into town, how are the people there?"

The old man said that he could not really tell, but he asked the driver, "How were the people in the town that you are leaving?"

"Oh, they are the nastiest of people, mean, rude, small-minded. We had the worst neighbours," said the man, and his wife and children nodded in agreement

The old farmer replied, "If that's the case, then you will find the same type of people in this town."

A few days later, another car drove by the old farmer's house. Again the driver asked the same question, "We are moving into town, how are the people there?"

The farmer asked, "How were the people in the town that you are leaving?"

"Oh, they are sweetest of folks. Our neighbours were helpful, and our children played together all the time. In fact, we are very sorry that we have to leave them."

The old man looked at the young family, and he said, "Well, you will find the same kind of people in this town."

The simple truth is that we make our own friends – "*A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly.*" Friendship is a demanding work, but it is a worthy work.



## **Be Faithful**

Matthew Henry described some people as “swallow-friends.” These are the ones who come in summer but leave in winter; people who hang around when their interests are served and when there is gain to be made; but when they had their fill or when difficult situations come, they will be the first to leave the scene.

Fair-weather friends and sunshine soldiers are common, but the true friend is rare. The Word of God says that the true friend is one who “*sticketh closer than a brother*” (Prov 18:24). The true friend “*loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity*” (Prov 17:17).

I have only one brother, and when we were younger, we had our fair share of spats. I always interpreted Proverbs 17:17b to mean that my younger brother’s life purpose was to bring adversity into my life; that proverbial thorn in the flesh. I was, of course, very wrong.

The verse means quite the opposite – a true friend loves at all times, and loves even more in worse times. And it is in times of adversity that friendship becomes kinship. In the midst of trials, a friend becomes as close as a brother.

Our Lord Jesus is the perfect example of a faithful friend. He loves us at all times. He loves us to the end (John 13:1). There is nothing that will separate us from His love (Rom 8:38-39). He expects us to do the same – “*This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends*” (John 15:12-13). “*Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren*” (1 John 3:16).

On 29 September 2006, Navy Seal Michael Monsoor and four other soldiers were engaged in a firefight, when a grenade thrown by the enemy bounced off Monsoor’s chest and fell to the floor near his fellow troops. Without thinking, Monsoor fell onto and covered the grenade with his body, saving the lives of his three comrades.

The motto of the United States Marine Corps is *Semper Fi* – the Latin for “forever faithful.” The two words exemplify the spirit of true friendship. *Semper Fi* should be the principle that Christians should embrace – forever faithful to the Christ who died for you, forever faithful to the people whom God have sent into your lives. Remember, “*A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity*” (Prov 17:17).

## **Be Sympathetic**

There is a Chinese saying that friends must share their pleasures, and bear one another’s burdens. This is also what Paul taught – “*Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ*” (Gal 6:2). “*Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep*” (Rom 12:15). This is sympathy, which one writer defines as “your pain in my heart.” True friends are sympathetic to one another so that the souls and hearts are knitted as one and they share one another’s joys and sorrows.

Sympathy is founded upon the doctrine that the church is a body of believers. There is a united interest and a common purpose, in which believers are mutually concerned about one another’s welfare – “*Whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it*” (1 Cor 12:26). In this way, the joys of one believer are shared amongst the believers and multiplied; and the sorrows of one are also shared and thus diffused.

## **Be Hospitable**

Hospitality is an essential prerequisite for leadership in the church (1 Tim 3:2; Tit 1:8). The Apostle Peter exhorts us to, "*use hospitality one to another without grudging*" (1 Pet 4:9). Paul also says, "*Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality*" (Rom 12:13).

The early Christians were given to hospitality. The record in Acts tells us that they had "*all things common*" (Acts 2:44; 4:32). The early Christians had a biblical understanding of materialism. They loosened their grip on their riches; they had an open-palm policy with regard to material things. They held out what they had in an open-palm. The poor and destitute could take what they needed. And when a person was in need, the rich and able would also come by and placed in the open palm what the destitute needed.

The law in the New Testament teaches us that whenever the opportunity presents itself, we are to "*do good to all men, especially to them who are of the household of faith*" (Gal 6:10).

Hospitality is one of the reasons for working hard, not so that we can enrich ourselves but "*rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth*" (Eph 4:28). In the larger context, Paul is saying that it is the responsibility of a Christian to look out for another brother in the Lord so that the latter would not have to resort to wrong doing so that he could meet his needs.

God did not create man to be alone. Sadly, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century church, we have mostly privatised our faith; for whatever reasons, we have built walls around our homes. That is not God's plan. Christianity is a relationship with God and His people. We are not to forsake "*the assembling of ourselves together...but exhorting one another*" (Heb 10:25). The Christian faith is best lived and expressed in a community of like-minded people. So, go out, reach out, lift up, and be a friend for Christ Jesus' sake.

15 Jun 08

Thank God for a most blessed and spiritually enriching camp. The distance to Kuantan, notwithstanding, this year was the most well-attended camp in our church history. I have had the opportunity to join the Chinese brethren for a couple of sessions and I must say that I too was blessed by the preaching of God's Word. Let us pray that the seed which has been planted will continue to bear much spiritual fruit. I want to add a personal word of thanks to the camp committee for their hard work.

Since the beginning of the year, we have been considering the various aspects of discipline that Christians must exercise in order to grow.

### **The Discipline of the Tongue**

For the last two weeks, we have been talking about the discipline of Christian friendship. True friendship requires commitment and sacrifice. It is hard work. It also takes time to cultivate, and as all worthwhile things in life, what you get out of a friendship depends very much on the amount of time and effort you put into it.

One of the things that is a stumbling block to good friendship is a loose tongue. The Apostle James devoted an entire chapter on that little thing within our mouths. The Book of Proverbs has many exhortations to control the use of our tongues. Why? Listen to what the Bible says about tongue – it is *“a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell”* (James 3:5-6).

### **The power of the tongue**

James compared the tongue to the bit in the mouth of a horse. A horse weighs anywhere between 800 to 1,000 pounds. When it is on the move, it takes several men to bring a horse down. Yet with a bit in its mouth, the same horse can be controlled by a 100-pound petite lady.

James also compared the tongue to the rudder of a ship. An ocean liner weighing hundreds of millions of tonnes is steered by a rudder that is a fraction of its size. The tongue is like the bit in the horse's mouth; it is like the rudder of the ship. It is a small thing that can do a great work – for good as well as for evil.

### **The destructive power of the tongue**

*“The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity...it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.”* In journalism school, I had to take a course on journalistic ethics. The classic case study of the impact of idle words from a wicked tongue happened in 1899, involving four news reporters in Colorado. On a slow lazy Saturday afternoon with nothing much happening, and a fast approaching deadline, the four men decided to make up a story.

They knew that they could not get away with a local story because it would be too obvious. So they decided to write about a far away place – China. Their story line – the Chinese government was going to tear down the Great Wall of China to open its borders for international trade. They added that American engineers were on their way to help demolish the wall, which was a symbol of pride for the Chinese.

The headlines in the Sunday newspaper read, “Great Chinese Wall Doomed! Peking Seeks World Trade.” No one, least of all the four news reporters, thought that this piece of false news would have any impact. But the news spread, and when the Chinese government heard that American engineers were going to demolish the wall, xenophobia seized a section of the Chinese population, namely the members of a secret society known as the Fists of Righteous Harmony, or the Boxers. In the ensuing months, China was plunged into a time of violence where hundreds of people, including Christian missionaries, were massacred. History records this as the Boxer rebellion, and it started in part with some idle words from four lazy men.

When James describes the tongue as *“a fire [that] setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell”* (James 3:6), he was talking about the destructive power of the tongue (it is a

fire) as well as the source of that fire (fire of hell). The point is that the destructive power of idle words is fuelled by the very fires of hell.

In what ways is the tongue destructive? Let me name three ways.

**Gossip:** “Have you heard . . .?” “Did you know . . .?” “Keep this to yourself . . .” “I tell you so that you can pray about it . . .” The words that follow these phrases are usually gossip. Gossip is the first and most destructive power of the tongue. When a whispering campaign starts, it spreads like wild fire, and the truth is distorted, the juicy parts are exaggerated. Like James, the wise preacher likens a gossiping tongue to fire – *“Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth. As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to kindle strife. The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly”* (Prov 26:20-22).

**Flattery:** Gossip is taking about a person behind his back what you would never say in his presence. Flattery is just the opposite. It is saying to a person in his presence what you would never say behind his back. The Bible also warns us about flattery – *“A man that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet”* (Prov 29:5).

**Criticism:** There are criticisms that are intended to push a person to do better. Sadly though, most criticism fall into the category of judgementalism. Sadly still, this is the kind of criticism that is prevalent in every church. Many critics would say that they are merely speaking their mind. But how often those who claim to speak their mind, do so without using it, and furthermore, do so without compassion. The Bible exhorts us *“to speak the truth in love”* (Eph 4:15).

### **The measure of one’s religion**

One writer describes these destructive powers of the tongue as verbal cyanide. These kinds of words not only hurt, but like poison, they cut to the very soul – *“The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly”* (Prov 18:8).

The Apostle James gives us a simple assessment for the sincerity of your faith – *“If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain”* (James 1:26).

The tongue, bear in mind, was also created by God, and as all created things, it was good until man’s fall. The saved person, however, must also redeem the use of his tongue. How can he do that?

**Speak about Jesus:** the tongue is the instrument of communicating the Gospel – *“How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?”* (Rom 10:14). Even amongst Christians, the Bible exhorts us to make Christ the centre of our conversations – *“Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it”* (Mal 3:16).

**Speak of Jesus:** from your lips come forth praises to honour our Lord. *“Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. Thus will I bless thee while I live...and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips”* (Ps 63:3-5; 40:9; 51:15; 119:171).

**Speak to Jesus:** from our lips also come forth prayers. One piece of advice that stayed with me is this – if you have nothing good to say about a person, pray for him. The church would be a better place and more effective testimony if Christians would pray more and speak less.

The tongue is a tool. The outcome depends on how it is used – blessing or cursing. For the Christian, it is obvious we cannot speak from both ends of our mouth – *“Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be”* (James 3:9-10). May the Lord help us to use our tongues for His glory.

22 Jun 08

Praise God whose grace is sufficient for our every need. The month of June has been a very hectic one. Besides preaching the evening messages at our Bible Camp in Kuantan, I also preached at the Maranatha BP Church Bible Camp as the Rev (Dr) Edward Paauwe had to go for spinal surgery just two weeks before the Maranatha BPC Camp. On top of that, there were two weddings in the church, plus preaching at Evangel BP Church before and after our Kuantan Camp. And it is only by the grace of God that we are able to do this; as Paul says "*not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God*" (2 Cor 3:5).

Please remember Evangel BP Church in your prayers. She has just celebrated her second anniversary which would make Evangel BPC the newest and youngest addition to the BP Church. Please pray for Eld (Dr) Lim Yew Cheng as he leads the congregation.

In July, we will be admitting into our church – by transfer, affirmation and baptism – those who have been worshipping with us for a period of time.

### **Why Water Baptism?**

The question is asked: Why is water baptism important? Water baptism is one of two sacraments/ordinances that were instituted by our Lord. While baptism is not a criterion for salvation, it is important for the following reasons: Our Lord Jesus Himself set the example (Matt 3:16). He commanded it (Matt 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16). The apostles themselves practised it; every conversion recorded in *Acts of the Apostles* was followed by baptism (Acts 2:38, 41; etc.). Water baptism is an illustration of a believer's new life; the Bible uses baptism to illustrate important spiritual truths, such as a believer's new life in Christ (Rom 6:1-10), and a believer's union with Christ (Gal 3:27); by submitting to water baptism, a believer publicly denounced his former self of sinful life and his submission to the lordship of Christ. The book of *Hebrews* presents baptism as a foundation truth of the Christian faith (Heb 6:1-2).

### **What is the purpose of baptism?**

Water baptism as commanded by the Lord is for a sign and a seal of the covenant of grace. It is a **sign** of the person's regeneration by the Holy Spirit (Tit 3:5). It is also a **seal** of our Lord's promises in the covenant as well as a seal of the believer's commitment to the Lord. By water baptism, a person is identified with the Saviour and His Church. A.A. Hodge describes baptism as "a visible sign of our covenant to be the Lord's, and devoted to His service...a public profession of our faith into the Christian Church, and a symbol of our union with our fellow-Christians."

This is radically different from the false and unscriptural teaching of baptismal regeneration which states that if a person is not baptized, he is not saved.

The Bible teaches that salvation is the work of Christ. On the cross of Calvary, our Lord Jesus cried out "*It is finished,*" meaning that the work of salvation is completed. Hence, to hold the view that baptism is an essential to salvation is to contradict the plain teaching of Holy Scripture (Rom 10:9, 10; Eph 2:8, 9; Titus 3:5).

### **How do we baptise?**

There are churches that insist immersion is the only mode of baptism because they take baptism to mean the death, burial and resurrection of the believer with our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 6:3-4).

Most churches of the Reformed tradition practise baptism by sprinkling. The Westminster Confession of Faith states, "Dipping of the person into the water [i.e. immersion] is not necessary; but baptism is rightly administered by pouring, or sprinkling water upon the person." (WCF, Chap 28.3).

Louis Berkhof says that our Lord Jesus Christ "did not prescribe a certain mode of baptism, and the Bible never stresses any particular mode." (Berkhof, *A Summary of Christian Doctrine*, p. 158).

There is no conclusive scriptural evidence that God stipulates only one particular mode of baptism. For one, the word "baptise" does not always mean to "immerse." It can also be taken to mean to "wet," or to "moisten" (see Mark 7:3-4).

In 1 Corinthians 10:2, the children of Israel are said to be all "*baptised unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.*" There was certainly no immersion in the Red Sea. Here, the word "baptised" refers to the act of consecration.

John the Baptist said that our Lord Jesus would baptise the people with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8). When the prophecy was fulfilled at Pentecost, the disciples were filled with the Spirit (Acts 2:4) and the outward manifestation was the tongues of fire that "*sat upon each of them*" (Acts 2:3).

We believe that the word "baptize" (Gk: *baptizo*) does not exclusively mean "immerse." We believe that just as baptism of the Holy Spirit is known as "*the washing of the regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost*" (Titus 3:5), in the same way, water baptism symbolises the cleansing by the Holy Ghost (Matt 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:26, 33; Acts 1:5; 11:16). Water is essential, how it is used is not. One can be washed without being immersed.

Good men over the centuries have debated this issue to no avail. The point is that our Lord Jesus did not prescribe a certain mode of baptism. The Bible never stressed one particular mode of baptism. The experience of the early church was that the several modes of baptism were all practised. Therefore, we conclude that the mode of baptism is an issue over which we should not be dogmatic.

### **Who can be baptised?**

Adult believer's baptism is self-evident. Any one who makes a conscious confession of our Lord Jesus Christ as his Saviour is to be baptised. That means, that it is inconceivable that a person who professes to believe and love the Lord would also refuse to be baptised.

In our church, before a person can be baptised, he must show sufficient evidence of his knowledge of the fundamental truths of the Christian faith, his personal knowledge of the Lord as his Saviour, and a consistent spiritual walk with the Lord.

Churches that adopt the WCF as the statement of faith practise infant baptism. "Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one, or both, believing parents, are to be baptized." (WCF, Chap 28.4).

Opponents of infant baptism often argued that the practice is a vestige of the Roman Catholic Church. This is the fallacy of guilt by association.

The practice of infant baptism in the RCC is totally different from that of the Reformed faith. First, the RCC believes in baptismal regeneration. From this erroneous premise, the RCC developed a whole body of dogma on baptism that is totally unscriptural.

But just because infant baptism is practised by the RCC and for all the wrong reasons, it does not mean that there is no biblical ground for infant baptism.

We believe in infant baptism because of our understanding of covenant theology. A covenant is a promise. God has always dealt with His people through covenant relationships.

God's covenant relationships extend beyond the individual to the family. For example, after Noah stepped out of the ark, God made a covenant with Noah and his children (Gen 9:8-13).

When God called Abraham out of the Ur of the Chaldees, God gave the promise of a land not only to Abraham but also to his children (Gen 12:7; 13:15-16). The sign of that covenant was circumcision, and it was applied to Abraham and his household (Gen 17:7-10).

The sign of circumcision was not an indication that those who received were saved, or even that they would certainly be saved in the future. The sign of circumcision is a sign that the children are set apart for God. We look at infant baptism that way (Acts 2:38-39).

Those who do not believe in infant baptism also argue that the practice creates a false security in the parents and the child. However, we have to understand that just because some – if not most – Christian parents have misunderstood and misapplied the covenant sign does not make the teaching behind it false.

Just as no Jew was saved by circumcision, no child is saved by water baptism. And it also does not mean that the child's salvation is necessarily assured in the future.

When believing parents present their children for baptism, they are invested with serious spiritual duties. When a child is presented for baptism, it is the redeemed parents who are consecrating themselves – a consecration that is not passive, but a consecration of their lives to the spiritual nurture of their child. In presenting the child for baptism, the parents must understand that it is not that they are trusting God but that He trusts them with His own heritage and reward (Ps 127:3).

Does that mean that every parent in our church must present his child for baptism? No. We realize the debate that rages over this issue, and we believe Christian liberty dictates that it is the duty of every parent and every believer to decide for himself which side to stand.

But we also believe that Christian charity also dictates that every believer and member give due honour in love to the views held by differing brethren.

Another way to look at the issue of infant baptism is to consider the common ground between those who believe in infant baptism and those who do not. Regardless of what they believe, parents on both sides of the issue must make it their earnest prayer and their life-time obligation to train up a child in the most holy faith.

29 Jun 08

It has been said that men who have been called into the full-time ministry have made a great sacrifice. In a recent conversation, the same comments were made about me, and the person – well-intentioned, no doubt – asked if I would consider going back to work as a journalist. My answer was a double negative: no, I never considered going into the full-time ministry a sacrifice; and no, I will never return to work as a journalist.

There are some people who mistakenly think that the higher up a person is in the socio-economic ladder, the greater his sacrifice when he goes into the full-time ministry. That somehow the sacrifices of a man with only an 'O' level certificate are less than that of a man equipped with a university degree. I disagree intensely with such an assessment because it stamps from human pride. True sacrifice does not count the cost because it does not really matter. True sacrifice comes when a man does not think there is a cost in doing the will of God. True sacrifice is when man's pride is eradicated so that he does not relish in what he has given up, and only delights in the Christ whom he serves. As Paul says, "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ" (Phil 3:8).

### **Pride – The Root Sin**

The Book of Proverbs tells us that God hates a number of things – "these six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him" (Prov 6:16). There are seven in all, but the first is a "proud look" (Prov 6:17). Pride is the root sin.

It was pride that led to the downfall of Lucifer. He was the anointed cherub and the angel of the morning. He was a creature of unspeakable beauty, but he wanted to be like the most High. In the deepest recesses of his heart, Lucifer said to himself, "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High" (Isa 14:13-14). As a result of his pride, Lucifer was cast out of heaven (Isa 14:12). Our Lord Jesus told the seventy followers, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven" (Luke 10:18).

The Bible tells us that the sin of pride found its way into the heart of Lucifer, but it does not tell us how it got there. God does not always reveal to us what we want to know, but He has revealed in the Holy Scriptures to us all that we need to know to help us deal with the exigencies of life, to be victorious over sin.

### **What is Pride?**

What Satan failed to do in heaven for himself, he was successful on earth in leading man to follow in his sinful ways. In the Garden of Eden, he sowed the seeds of pride into the hearts of Adam and Eve. The devil tempted Eve with the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, "For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods" (Gen 3:5).

Pride is deification of the self: Lucifer wanted to be like the most High. He "promised" Eve that she shall be as gods. The essence of pride is to deify oneself. Pride is to take to oneself the honour that rightly belongs to God. It was the sin of Pharaoh who defied Moses and said, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go" (Exod 5:2).



It was the sin of Nebuchadnezzar that caused him to say “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?” (Dan 4:30).

It is the sin of the man who makes himself the centre of the world, who thinks of no one but himself. It is the sin of the man who must be heard first and also have the last word. Pride is the sin of the man who sets himself on the pedestal to be admired and worshipped.

Pride is independence from God: The sin of pride also drives a man to be independent of God. It is the sin of the foolish farmer who had “much goods laid up for many years” that he has no need for God’s provision (Luke 12:19). It is the sin of the businessman who had his plans and contingencies all in order, so that he would “go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain” (James 4:13). Both fools, however, found out that their lives were in the hands of God.

Pride is the sin of the man who plans God out of his life. The sin of pride in the Christian is seen in his demotion of God to one who merely rubber-stamps his plans.

Pride is deprecation of others: No man is proud because he is rich or handsome or intelligent. A man is proud because he is richer, better looking and cleverer than someone else. The sin of pride always has the element of comparison.

It is the sin of the man who saw the splinter in the eye of his brother but failed to notice the beam in his. It is the sin of the Pharisee who “stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican” (Luke 18:11). It is interesting to note that the sin of pride in the Pharisee is also seen in the deification of himself – he “prayed thus with himself.”

Pride is the sin that causes one man to show contempt for another. It is the sin that drives one to win at all costs. It is the sin that expresses itself in an unforgiving attitude.

### **God Hates Pride**

There is no sin more abhorrent to God than that of pride. God speaks of the sin of pride most vehemently. “Him that hath an high look and a proud heart will not I suffer” (Ps 101:5b). “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate” (Prov 8:13). “Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD” (Prov 16:5). “God resisteth the proud” (James 4:6).

Can Christians condone what God hates? God forbid. Christians must take a radical approach to pride. One English preacher writes, “Look not at pride only as an unbecoming temper, not humility only as a decent virtue...One is all hell and the other all heaven.”

### **The Cures for Pride**

The antithesis of pride is humility. The cure is easy, but the treatment takes more than just knowing what the cure is.

Know Ourselves: As God’s children, we must look at ourselves in the same way that God looks at us. We must also look at the sin of pride the same way that God does. Bernard of Clairvaux defines humility as the consciousness of one’s unworthiness. No man can conquer a sin of which he is unconscious and over which he does not grieve. Is it not often said that if our thoughts are

made known, every one of us will bow our heads in shame? That being the case, are we not humbled that God knows us for who we really are?

Know God: The Bible says that it is unwise for a man to compare himself with others (2 Cor 10:12). There are Christians who think that they have given a great deal to the work of the Gospel, but look to God – He gave His Son. There are others who think they have made great sacrifices for God, but look to our Saviour – He endured the cross and despised the shame for our sakes. There are also people who see themselves as vessels of greater honour, but look to the Holy Spirit – He is the treasure in us that makes us precious.

Dear friends, it is all about Christ and not I. May God bless us with the spirit of humility of John the Baptist, when he said, “He [Christ] must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30).

Lovingly in Christ,  
Pastor Isaac Ong

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