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05 Oct 08

Biblical worship is man's humble response to God's revelation. It is God who seeks the true worshipper (John 4:23), meaning to say that God is seeking the person who worships truthfully. This means more than just the man who worships God sincerely, but also one who worships Him biblically, according to the Holy Scripture.

Our God is a covenant-keeping God. He told Abraham, "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee" (Gen 17:7). This was the covenant God re-established with the patriarchs – Isaac, Jacob (Exod 3:6, 15; 4:5; Matt 22:32). Despite the stubborn unfaithfulness of the children of Israel, God continually reminded the people, "This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer 31:33; see also 24:7; Ezek 11:20; 37:23-27).

The same covenant also applies in the New Testament. The Apostle Paul told the Corinthians that they "are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (2 Cor 6:16).

The various passages reveal to us one central point that God is our God, and we are His people. God reveals and provides, and we respond in praise and service. This revelation-response structure of our Worship is a reflection of God's covenant of grace. This dialogue form of worship is also seen in other portions of Holy Scripture. The Psalmist says, "I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised" (Ps 18:3; 105:1; 116:13, 17; etc.).

Bible worship is strictly a vertical relationship between God and the worshippers. The horizontal relationship between men and men comes as a result of God's blessings flowing down into our lives to such abundance that we naturally become blessings to other worshippers.

### **Leading, Worshipping and Preaching**

In the pre-Reformation church, worship was entirely the work of the priests; the people in the pews were at best attendees and non-participatory observers. In Reformed church, no distinction is made between gender or age or talent.

"Is the Word of God to be read by all?" The answer in the Westminster Larger Catechism is: "Although all are not to be permitted to read the Word publicly to the

congregation, yet all sorts of people are bound to read it apart by themselves, and with their families: to which end, the holy scriptures are to be translated out of the original into vulgar languages” (WLC, 156).

In other words, men and women, young and old, the choir and congregation read Scripture, sing praises, pray and tithe together. However, the Larger Catechism does put a restriction on the person who preaches the Word; “The Word of God is to be preached only by such as are sufficiently gifted, and also duly approved and called to that office” (WLC, 158).

It is clear that the office of the minister is to give the Word on behalf of God. And the role of the congregation is to respond to God with hymns and prayers.

What about specific duties like leading in worship? There are two extreme views. There are churches, even Reformed ones, that believe and practise clericalism. This is the position that only ordained ministers can lead in worship. These churches believe there ought to be a distinction between the clergy and the laity. However, this notion of clericalism cannot be substantiated by Holy Scripture. The Bible teaches that all believers are “a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9). Furthermore, there are examples in the Bible where deacons (Stephen and Philip) who were appointed to the business of taking care of the needs of the believers preached (Acts 6:2-3; 7:2-53; 8:5).

At the end, there are churches who believe that every worshipper is also a pastor, and makes no differentiation between the trained and ordained minister and the worshipper. The teaching universal priesthood cannot be used to support this stand. Clearly, when the Apostle Paul ordained elders in the churches, the act of ordination places a great responsibility on and demands a greater accountability from the individuals.

James also warns the person who aspires to be a preacher, “My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation” (James 3:1). For this reason, in our Church, we restrict the work of leading in worship and administering the Lord’s Supper to deacons and elders.

## **Active Worship**

If the various aspects of a worship service are assigned to leaders of the church, is the worshipper’s role passive? The answer is no. Worshippers are to remain alert and engaged even though someone else is leading in prayer or preaching. The Shorter Catechism says that worshippers must attend to all aspects of the worship service “with diligence, preparation, and prayer; receive it with faith and love, lay it up in our hearts, and practice it in our lives” (WSC, 90).

Worshippers are not passive observers but active participants. One good example from the Bible is Mary of Bethany, she sat at the feet of our Lord Jesus, and He said that she had “chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:42).

There are some churches that, in an attempt, to make the worship services more interesting and participatory, include a segment in the worship service for personal testimonies and to have worshippers greet one another. Personal testimonies and greetings are not wrong in themselves, but that is the not the reason we come to worship.

Again, by way of reminder, the purpose of worship is to praise God, and the focus of every believer is therefore not to look for ways to make worship more interesting or to invent new acts that would involve more participation from the pews. Instead, every believer should be looking for ways to immerse himself in the singing of hymns, in praying, and in the ministry of the Word of God. This may not sound very exciting, and it is by no means an easy too, but it is the means ordained by God by which we worship Him and through which we are built up in our faith.

12 Oct 08

We take a break from our study on worship to deal with a current event that has been hogging the headlines in the newspapers for the last few weeks. The world financial markets were shaken at the core. The US government has taken over the country's largest mortgage houses – Fannie May and Freddie Mac. Well known financial institutions, and the biggest names in Wall Street such as Bear Stearns, Lehman Brothers, Merrill Lynch, disappeared overnight. Those left standing are also teetering on the verge of collapse. Washington had to pump in some US\$85 billion dollars to keep AIG, America's largest insurance company afloat. The US government is now in the midst of a carving out a bailout programme of almost US\$700 billion (or S\$1 trillion).

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) said that the present crisis is “the largest financial shock since the Great Depression,” adding that there is one-in-four chance of a full-blown global recession over the next 12 months.

The panic in the United States reverberated across the oceans. In Hong Kong, hundreds of customers, on a rumour, swamped the Bank of East Asia fearing that they would lose their deposits. Back home, when news of the collapse of AIG hit home, hundreds of concerned customers staked out the local AIA offices worried about their investments and insurance policies.

There are many factors contributing to the present financial crisis, but the problem started primarily with sub-prime mortgage collapse. It began with people buying properties at inflated prices. The mortgage houses and banks accepted the excessive valuations of houses as a never ending game. The more loans they made, the more money they made. Home buyers, on the other hand, were caught up in the easy credit, and they bought more than what they could afford. Then the proverbial bubble burst.

In a perfect world, this would never happen. The banks would never lend money to people who do not have a good credit rating. And people will never borrow money from the bank if they know that they cannot pay. In a perfect world, every transaction is based on good common sense and made by moral beings. Alas, our world is not perfect, and common sense is often overridden by greed.

In the past, news of financial crises has little bearing on our lives beyond the loss of jobs. But now with the liberalization of CPF funds, every Singaporean is an investor. Even though few of us can understand the implications of multi-billion dollar bailouts, the present global financial crisis is a macrocosm of our individual lives and families, and Christian must therefore know the biblical principles that will help us to be wise participants in this economy.

**Desire for Gain is not Sinful**

First, the desire for profit and gain is not in itself sinful. In the parable of the sower, the seed that fell on good ground *“brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold”* (Matt 13:8). The farmer who had the bumper harvest was not condemned for the increase in his goods. He was a fool because *“he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God”* (Luke 12:21). The businessman was not condemned for planning to *“buy and sell, and get gain”* (James 4:13-14), but he was condemned because he did not have God in his plans. The Bible also teaches that we should not *“muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward”* (1 Tim 5:18).

### **Greed is Gain at Another’s Expense**

Second, honest gains become greed when individuals seek an unrealistic gain at the expense of others through the use of dishonest means – false advertisement, deceit, withholding of facts – to gain what they want. In our fallen world, greed is a part of our human nature. Greed is a constant temptation. Greed will drive some people to commit grievous sins – *“He that oppressteth the poor to increase his riches”* (Prov 22:16) *“He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house”* (Prov 15:27). *“So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; which taketh away the life of the owners thereof”* (Prov 1:19). *“The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death”* (Prov 21:6).

In the Bible, we read about Ahab who killed Naboth in order to get his vineyard (1 Kings 21). Samuel’s sons *“turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment”* (1 Sam 8:3). Achan’s greed brought trouble upon a whole nation (Joshua 7). Paul warns us of the dangers that come with the love for money – *“They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows”* (1 Tim 6:9-10).

### **Beware of Easy Money**

This present crisis is fuelled by people who thought that they could make a quick buck. The Bible’s advice is that *“wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase”* (Prov 13:11). Riches that come by blowing out air will soon be gone.

After he had been cured of his leprosy, Naaman, the Syrian general rewarded Elisha a hefty reward. Elisha refused the reward. But Elisha’s servant, Gehazi was overtaken by greed, and he thought that if his master did not want the reward, he would not mind having a portion of it (2 Kings 5:20); so he ran after Naaman. However, Elisha exposed Gehazi’s greed and cursed him with the leprosy of Naaman (2 Kings 5:26-27).

In this day of quick turn-around profits, even Christians are tempted to go after the quick buck and the easy money. Beware; the quick buck comes with entangling strings. God

gives us these warnings: *“An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning; but the end thereof shall not be blessed”* (Prov 20:21). *“Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues without right”* (Prov 16:8). *“He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity”* (Eccl 5:10).

### **Live on What you Have!**

Sadly, Christians are also caught in the rat race, and trying to live up to the Joneses. One of the underlying reasons for the sub-prime mortgage crisis is realtors and mortgage houses preying on the pride and covetousness of home-buyers into buying something more than they can afford. The result is that the buyers have incurred debt not just from their mortgage but also from their car-payments, credit card bills. The result is a pit of debt. Debt is simply spending money which we do not have. The Bible is right: debt is slavery. *“The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender”* (Prov 22:7).

Paul says, *“I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need”* (Phil 4:11-12). My advice for couples preparing for marriage is that if both spouses are working, they should learn to live only on one income.

### **Remember God’s Commands!**

The market place is a testing ground for the Christian and his values. God does not frown upon hard and honest work – *“The labourer is worthy of his hire”* (Luke 10:7). However, God will judge the dishonest means – inflated valuations, under-the-table practices, insider information – to get wealth. *“Thou shalt not have in thy bag divers weights, a great and a small. Thou shalt not have in thine house divers measures, a great and a small. But thou shalt have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have... For all that do such things, and all that do unrighteously, are an abomination unto the LORD thy God”* (Deut 25:13-16).

God also honours investment and thrift, and Christians must be careful not to go for short-term gains and quick profits. *“Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom. Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven”* (Prov 23:4-5).

### **Conclusion**

As long as our Lord tarries in His return, you can be sure that this current financial meltdown will not be the last. But God’s people can be spared from this by knowing and realizing our role and our place in this global economy.

First, remember that we are stewards of all that God has given us. Everything we are, everything we do, and everything we own truly belongs to God.

Second, remember that this world is not our home and our treasure is not found here but in heaven. *“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth...But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven...For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also”*(Matt 6:19-21).

Third, remember God and His will for us. In our work and investment, we are to do all, invest all, own all, purchase all to the glory of God. *“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God”* (1 Cor 10:31).

Fourth, remember God’s people. The effects of the US financial crisis will eventually hit Singapore. There may be some in our midst who will lose their jobs. *“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).

It is in crisis that a person’s character is forged. The Chinese word for “crisis” is made up of two words 危机 (danger, opportunity). I am not referring to the right opportunity to enter the market, but the opportunity to take stock of our lives, as our Lord tells us, *“life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth”* (Luke 12:15).

19 Oct 08

Thank you for your prayers for my trip to Sri Lanka. I left for Sri Lanka on the night of 6 October; earlier in the day, there was suicide bombing in the north province of Anuradhapura. This was first bombing in several months, and it was also the most devastating. The bombing killed over twenty people including a retired general and his wife. The general was a famous war hero and a key opposition leader.

Thus I landed touched down at the Colombo International airport to extremely tight security. It did not help when Elder Vijayenthiran (VJ) was late in coming to the airport. I waited outside the airport for about half an hour and when I asked to enter the terminal to make a phone call, the soldiers refused permission. As it turned out, Elder VJ was also delayed by the various security checks to the airport. On the way to the hotel, I noticed that the streets in Colombo were very quiet even though it was only about 10 o'clock at night. The shops were closed, there was very little traffic, and there were hardly any pedestrians on the streets.

On 9 October, there was second suicide bombing several miles away from the Chapel. This time, the targets of the assassination, Sri Lanka's agricultural minister and his deputy escaped unhurt, but one innocent passer-by was killed and several others were injured. During the first week that I was there, the police visited the Chapel on two occasions. The first visit on Tuesday (7 October) was to get the names of the GI students and the construction workers working on the annex. The second visit on Friday (10 October), the supervisor of the construction workers was arrested.

### **Geneva Institute**

From Tuesday to Friday (7-10 October), there were daily lectures to the students from the Geneva Institute (GI). There were thirteen students, most of them were full-time students at the GI; a few of them were evangelists from Hatton, Trincomalee, and Batticaloa, mission stations in the north. The lectures ran from 9:00 am to 12 noon, and then from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm, except on Wednesday, when the lectures were held in the afternoon from 3:00 pm to 5:00 pm because of the mid-week prayer meeting. Dr Paul Hoole interpreted for me for the morning lectures, and Elder Vijayenthiran in the evening.

I really appreciate the attention and the attitude of the students. They had to sit through the long lessons under the hot and humid Sri Lankan weather, put up with the noise from the construction of the church annex and the children from the Geneva Nursery (GN). Because of the construction, some of the students were squeezed into two small made-shift rooms which served as their living quarters. There was, however, not a word of complaint. They finished the course on Pastoral Theology on Friday with an one-hour examination.

I am much humbled by their devotion to the study of the Bible and their ministry. They laboured under conditions much severe than we who are in Singapore can imagine. We can impart knowledge only because of the training opportunities that God has afforded us,



but the GI students, by their example, would be far better teachers than we in inspiring believers to greater devotion in the Gospel ministry.

### **Geneva Nursery**

The GN is under the charge of Mrs Paul Hoole. She and several teachers had over 50 children under their charge, and they served as pool for evangelism. According to Elder VJ, the GN will break even this year. God willing, it will be a profit-generating entity to help support the Gospel ministry of the Calvary Reformed Presbyterian Chapel (CRPC).

### **Building Annex**

The building of the annex is proceeding very well. The building is expected to be completed in January 2009. When completed, the ground floor of the four-storey building will be used as classrooms for the GN children. It will also provide living quarters for the church warden. The second floor will be used as lecture halls and a library for the GI students. The third level will serve as dormitories for the GI students, and the fourth level will house a parsonage and guest rooms for visitors. Please pray for the leadership of CRPC, they are still S\$250,000 short of the building fund. And as the Lord moves, please give.

I had opportunities to see the work and also meet with some of the construction workers. Most of them are Hindus. Life for the workers is hard, the average pay of a construction worker is about 400 rupees a day. One Singapore dollar is equivalent to 70 rupees, which works out to about S\$6 a day. A skilled worker gets about 700 rupees. The wages are low and the work is tedious. However, more tragic than their material poverty is their spiritual poverty. Because of their Hindu religion, they will never see a way out of their present state. They have come to accept their station in life. Even though they have many opportunities to hear the Gospel and learn about God and His saving grace while working at the chapel, their hearts remained hardened. They accept their life as their fate, and they are trapped in their fatalism.

### **Arie and Jeanette**

Arie and Jeanette Droogendjck have been here since July this year. The Droogendjcks are members of the Vancouver BP Church. They have been granted a two-year visa. Arie is helping to teach the GI students English; he teaches a Bible course once a week, leads in some Bible Studies, trains the students in street evangelism, makes home visitations to Sunday school children, and helps with the administration of the Chapel.

Jeanette has her own ministry among her Sri Lankan friends. She has been inviting Sinhalese ladies to her home, and giving them tracts and distributing Sinhalese *Daily Bread*. Please continue to pray for their ministry. Arie has also taken to learning Tamil, and is now able to converse with the GI students with his smattering Tamil.

### **CRPC 8<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

CRPC celebrated its eighth anniversary on 12 October 2008. On the way to the church, security was tight with armed soldiers stationed at every road junction and doing house-to-house search for a terrorist suspect.

The Lord's Day began with the morning worship service and baptismal service. There were two adult baptisms, one reaffirmation of faith (Esther, Dr Paul's Hoole's eldest child), one transfer of membership, and one infant baptism.

One of those who was baptised that day was Chamila, a Sinhalese girl from Kandy, about 3 hours north of Colombo. She had lived in a town where most of the people were either Muslims or Buddhists. When she told her Buddhist parents that she was attending church in Colombo, they were furious. As it turned out, she was the first in her village to be converted to the Christian faith. In the week prior to her baptism, she was worried about the reaction from her parents.

On the Lord's Day morning, her parents with one of her brothers and sisters arrived at the Chapel at 7:30 am to witness her baptism. When I posed her the baptismal questions, I have never heard a more affirmative confession of faith. Over lunch, Elder VJ managed to share the Gospel also with Chamila's parents. God willing, she will be the Lydia whose heart God opened and through whom, the household would come to saving faith in Christ Jesus.

CRPC's eighth Anniversary Thanksgiving service began at 5:00 pm. There were over 200 people in attendance despite the torrential downpour. The GN and the Sunday School children presented several special items.

Calvary Jurong is committed to supporting CRPC until 2010. Please pray for our Lord to bless His work in Colombo that in the years to come, it will be able to self-support.

### **Youth Conference and Gospel Meeting**

On Tuesday, I spoke twice at a Youth Conference, and then at a Gospel meeting the same evening at another part of Colombo. I left Colombo on Wednesday (15 October) midnight and arrived in Singapore at 6:15 am. Again, I thank you for your prayers. Please also continue to pray for the work in Sri Lanka.

26 Oct 08

There another need for a new reformation?

In sixteenth-century Europe, God sent a revival that brought His church out of spiritual darkness and bondage. Historians described this period of time as the Protestant Reformation, and they recognized it as one of the earth-shaking events in the history of mankind. The church which had been shrouded in darkness and superstition was delivered by Martin Luther, an Augustinian monk chosen of God, whose heart was bound by the Scriptures, and whose conscience was held captive to the Word of God. We are some 491 years removed from the day when he nailed the 95 theses on the door of the Wittenberg Castle challenging the authority of the Roman Church and the veracity of its teachings.

That was then, and we are here and now in the twenty-first century; the question that evangelicals must consider is this – Might the church today be in need of a reformation and revival? Whenever this question is asked, I have not met a Bible-believing Christian who would not give a hearty affirmation to the urgent need for true evangelical revival in the church. The spirit is there, but the will to do that which is needful, however, is sadly in short supply.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century church has departed from the spirit of the Reformers. We have become enamoured with the world. We have watered down the Holy Scriptures with men's opinions. We have substituted historical and biblical theology with modern pop psychology. We have exchanged biblical principles for pragmatism. We have replaced the preaching of the Gospel to convert sinners with offering therapy to make depressed sinners into happy and well-adjusted ones. Our sanctuary of worship has become a stage for entertainment. The preacher has become an entertainer. The sermon is reduced to a pep-talk. The worshipper just wants to be blessed with no demands made on him to grow in godliness. We have departed from the Reformers' position where the Bible is the authority in our faith and life, and we have embraced the secularists' perversion that teaches that every man is free to do what he wants as long as he does it sincerely. Hence the question again: Might the church today be in dire need of a reformation and revival?

Such an attempt was made in 1996. A group of 120 evangelicals met in Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, and appended their names to the Cambridge Declaration. I produced for you an excerpt of what they had affirmed.

### **THE CAMBRIDGE DECLARATION**

Evangelical churches today are increasingly dominated by the spirit of this age rather than by the Spirit of Christ. As evangelicals, we call ourselves to repent of this sin and to recover the historic Christian faith.

In the course of history words change. In our day this has happened to the word "evangelical." In the past it served as a bond of unity between Christians from a wide

diversity of church traditions. Historic evangelicalism was confessional. It embraced the essential truths of Christianity as those were defined by the great ecumenical councils of the church. In addition, evangelicals also shared a common heritage in the “solas” of the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation.

Today the light of the Reformation has been significantly dimmed. The consequence is that the word “evangelical” has become so inclusive as to have lost its meaning. Because of this crisis and because of our love of Christ, His gospel and His church, we endeavour to assert anew our commitment to the central truths of the Reformation and of historic evangelicalism. These truths we affirm not because of their role in our traditions, but because we believe that they are central to the Bible.

### ***Sola Scriptura: The Erosion Of Authority***

Scripture alone is the inerrant rule of the church’s life, but the evangelical church today has separated Scripture from its authoritative function. In practice, the church is guided, far too often, by the culture. Therapeutic technique, marketing strategies, and the beat of the entertainment world often have far more to say about what the church wants, how it functions and what it offers, than does the Word of God...As biblical authority has been abandoned in practice, as its truths have faded from Christian consciousness, and as its doctrines have lost their saliency, the church has been increasingly emptied of its integrity, moral authority and direction...Biblical truth is indispensable to the church’s understanding, nurture and discipline...It is only in the light of God’s truth that we understand ourselves aright and see God’s provision for our need. The Bible, therefore, must be taught and preached in the church. Sermons must be expositions of the Bible and its teachings, not expressions of the preachers’ opinions or the ideas of the age. We must settle for nothing less than what God has given. The work of the Holy Spirit in personal experience cannot be disengaged from Scripture. The Spirit does not speak in ways that are independent of Scripture. Apart from Scripture we would never have known of God’s grace in Christ. The biblical Word, rather than spiritual experience, is the test of truth.

*We reaffirm the inerrant Scripture to be the sole source of written divine revelation, which alone can bind the conscience. The Bible alone teaches all that is necessary for our salvation from sin and is the standard by which all Christian behaviour must be measured. We deny that any creed, council or individual may bind a Christian’s conscience, that the Holy Spirit speaks independently of or contrary to what is set forth in the Bible, or that personal spiritual experience can ever be a vehicle of revelation.*

### ***Solus Christus: The Erosion Of Christ-Centred Faith***

As evangelical faith becomes secularized, its interests have been blurred with those of the culture. The result is a loss of absolute values, permissive individualism, and a substitution of wholeness for holiness, recovery for repentance, intuition for truth, feeling for belief, chance for providence, and immediate gratification for enduring hope. Christ and His cross have moved from the centre of our vision.

*We reaffirm that our salvation is accomplished by the mediatorial work of the historical Christ alone. His sinless life and substitutionary atonement alone are sufficient for our justification and reconciliation to the Father. We deny that the gospel is preached if Christ's substitutionary work is not declared and faith in Christ and His work is not solicited.*

### ***Sola Gratia: The Erosion Of The Gospel***

Unwarranted confidence in human ability is a product of fallen human nature. This false confidence now fills the evangelical world; from the self-esteem gospel, to the health and wealth gospel, from those who have transformed the gospel into a product to be sold and sinners into consumers who want to buy, to others who treat Christian faith as being true simply because it works. This silences the doctrine of justification regardless of the official commitments of our churches.

God's grace in Christ is not merely necessary but is the sole efficient cause of salvation. We confess that human beings are born spiritually dead and are incapable even of cooperating with regenerating grace.

*We reaffirm that in salvation we are rescued from God's wrath by His grace alone. It is the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit that brings us to Christ by releasing us from our bondage to sin and raising us from spiritual death to spiritual life. We deny that salvation is in any sense a human work. Human methods, techniques or strategies by themselves cannot accomplish this transformation. Faith is not produced by our unregenerated human nature.*

### ***Sola Fide: The Erosion Of The Chief Article***

Justification is by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone. This is the article by which the church stands or falls. Today this article is often ignored, distorted or sometimes even denied by leaders, scholars and pastors who claim to be evangelical...Many in the church growth movement believe that sociological understanding of those in the pew is as important to the success of the gospel as is the biblical truth which is proclaimed. As a result, theological convictions are frequently divorced from the work of the ministry. The marketing orientation in many churches takes this even further, erasing the distinction between the biblical Word and the world, robbing Christ's cross of its offence, and reducing Christian faith to the principles and methods which bring success to secular corporations.

While the theology of the cross may be believed, these movements are actually emptying it of its meaning. There is no gospel except that of Christ's substitution in our place whereby God imputed to Him our sin and imputed to us His righteousness...There is no basis for our acceptance before God except in Christ's saving work...The gospel declares what God has done for us in Christ. It is not about what we can do to reach Him.

*We reaffirm that justification is by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone. In justification Christ's righteousness is imputed to us as the only possible satisfaction of God's perfect justice. We deny that justification rests on any merit to be found in us, or upon the grounds of an infusion of Christ's righteousness in us, or that an institution claiming to be a church that denies or condemns sola fide can be recognized as a legitimate church.*

### ***Soli Deo Gloria: The Erosion Of God-Centred Worship***

Wherever in the church biblical authority has been lost, Christ has been displaced, the gospel has been distorted, or faith has been perverted, it has always been for one reason: our interests have displaced God's and we are doing His work in our way. The loss of God's centrality in the life of today's church is common and lamentable. It is this loss that allows us to transform worship into entertainment, gospel preaching into marketing, believing into technique, being good into feeling good about ourselves, and faithfulness into being successful. As a result, God, Christ and the Bible have come to mean too little to us and rest too inconsequentially upon us.

God does not exist to satisfy human ambitions, cravings, the appetite for consumption, or our own private spiritual interests. We must focus on God in our worship, rather than the satisfaction of our personal needs. God is sovereign in worship; we are not. Our concern must be for God's kingdom, not our own empires, popularity or success.

*We reaffirm that because salvation is of God and has been accomplished by God, it is for God's glory and that we must glorify Him always. We must live our entire lives before the face of God, under the authority of God and for His glory alone. We deny that we can properly glorify God if our worship is confused with entertainment, if we neglect either Law or Gospel in our preaching, or if self-improvement, self-esteem or self-fulfillment are allowed to become alternatives to the gospel.*

### ***Call To Repentance And Reformation***

The faithfulness of the evangelical church in the past contrasts sharply with its unfaithfulness in the present. Earlier in this century, evangelical churches sustained a remarkable missionary endeavour, and built many religious institutions to serve the cause of biblical truth and Christ's kingdom. That was a time when Christian behaviour and expectations were markedly different from those in the culture. Today they often are not. The evangelical world today is losing its biblical fidelity, moral compass and missionary zeal.

We repent of our worldliness. We have been influenced by the "gospels" of our secular culture, which are no gospels. We have weakened the church by our own lack of serious repentance, our blindness to the sins in ourselves which we see so clearly in others, and our inexcusable failure adequately to tell others about God's saving work in Jesus Christ.

### **Comments**

The Cambridge Declaration ended with a call to all Christians to give consideration to implementing the five truths in the church's worship, ministry, policies, life and evangelism. That was twelve years ago. Twelve years later, the tide *for* reformation has not turned. On the contrary, the tide *against* the historic and biblical Christianity continues to swell and strengthen. The church of Christ today is worldlier than ever because the people who go to church today are worldlier. The church is weak and losing its influence in the world because Christians are spiritually lethargic. Might the church today be in dire need of a reformation and revival? Absolutely, but revival will never come until individual Christians and covenant homes bind themselves to the Word of God as their rule of life and faith. May the Lord have mercy on us!

02 Nov 08

Last Friday (24 October), the Jurong Calvary Kindergarten had its graduation ceremony. In attendance were the Minister for Finance and Member of Parliament for Jurong, Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam, and several key members of the local civic leaders. The graduating K2 children put up a most impressive Christmas play, and the guests and parents were clearly impressed. We thank God for giving the JCK the opportunity to minister to these children in their formative years, and we pray that the Bible lessons that they learnt as part of their curriculum will bear much fruit in due time. We praise God also for Dns Pat Lin and her team of teachers for their dedication and labour of love.

As we have seen in our study on biblical worship over the last few months, it is clear that the basis for worship rests upon the Holy Scriptures, and the nature of worship takes the form of a dialogue between God and the church. Thus the Bible teaches us what is involved in worship (the parts of a worship service), who worships (the participants of a worship service), and who is worship for (the principal of worship, who is God).

The Bible also shows us the how – the practice of worship. It is not enough that we have the right parts of worship; we must also have the right attitude when we worship God. The Psalmist says, “*God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him*” (Ps 89:7). Reverence is at the heart of the Christian’s worship. Sadly, we are living in an age where children call their parents by their first names, where rebellion against authority is portrayed as freedom of expression, and where reverence for God is ridiculed as spiritual oppression.

The worship in the modern church tends to be informal. Modern day worship is geared toward the worshipper’s needs. Pastors are under increasing pressure to conduct their worship services similar to that of the church under the road with the better lighting and sound systems, where the music is loud and the beat is strong. This form of worship is often defended as effective because the people must find the church worship service interesting and stimulating; never mind if the worship service that is irreverent and not in line with God’s character and nature.

### ***Reverence in Worship***

To know what reverential worship is, it would be helpful for us to know what reverential worship is not. Reverential worship is not formal ritualistic worship. The structured liturgies we see in some of the churches are not necessarily reverent worship. Some formal and ritualistic liturgies are just as irreverent as cotemporary informal worship.

John Calvin wrote that reverence comes by way of a “faith so joined with an earnest fear of God that this fear also embraces willing reverence, and carries with it such legitimate worship as is prescribed in the law. And we ought to note this fact even more diligently: all men have a vague general veneration for God, but very few really reverence him; and wherever there is great ostentation in ceremonies, sincerity of heart is rare indeed”



(*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 1, Chapter 2). Reverential worship is marked by simplicity whereby the worshipper's senses (what he hears and sees) are focused on God and His Word.

Reverential worship is also not elitist worship. The church organist that plays only works of Bach, for example, may be as irreverent as the Gospel rock band playing one of the top hits in the contemporary Christian music charts. When the worshipper's attention is drawn away from God and His Word to the skills of the musicians, the worship service has lost its reverence.

Reverential worship is not cheerless worship. There is fullness of joy in the presence of the LORD (Ps 16:11). The Psalmist writes, "*Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing...Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name*" (Ps 100:2-4).

However, the joy in worship is not found in the company of friends, or from the one-liners of a stand-up comic known as the preacher, or the sounds of feet-tapping, body-swaying music, but God. The Psalmist says, "*I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy: yea, upon the harp will I praise thee, O God my God*" (Ps 43:4).

Reverential worship is not cold and unemotional; rather it will produce the right emotions because we have come into the presence of the holy God. In the Old Testament, we find that every detail of worship was spelt out – the types of sacrifices, the chemical composition of the incense, etc. All these served as a reminder of the holiness of God and the sinfulness of men.

The Old Testament worship is a type of the New Testament worship. The blood sacrifices of the Old Testament are fulfilled in Christ, but the object of our worship is still Christ (Heb 9). Today, the specific form of the Old Testament is removed, but the principles remain in the New Testament. We are to worship reverently.

### **Confident but Not Callous**

There are believers who think that because Christ is our perfect sacrifice, it does not matter how we worship. Because New Testament worship does not involve the slaying of animals and the pouring of blood, there are believers who think reverence in worship is not a proper emotion. Since God has given us freedom in Christ, they argue, Christians should not be so uptight in their worship.

The Bible exhorts us to "*come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need*" (Heb 4:16). To "come boldly" is to "come confidently," but not brashly or callously.

The confidence that we have to come boldly before God rests on the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. And it is that confidence in Christ that makes for reverence in worship. Here is a simple test of your attitude in worship: why do you worship the way you do? Does

your worship reflect your utter confidence in Christ, or does it reflect unwarranted confidence in yourself? Are you looking to God or are you looking to men?

Reverence in worship is passé in most churches today. Most Christians would prefer to have worship that is “hip and hop” than holy, and this “hip-hop worship” is seen and heard in the church music. God willing, we will touch on music in worship in the weeks to come.

Paul exhorts us that *“no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord”* (1 Cor 1:29-31). Glorify the Lord – that is the purpose of Christian worship. And our God is most glorified when His people give Him the pre-eminence in worship.

09 Nov 08  
Music in worship

Before the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Reformation, the church worship service was very much a performance. The Gregorian chants were nice, but the average worshipper could not understand it, much less sing it. The church-goers were for most parts non-participants.

The Reformation also reformed worship by making it participatory. Worshippers read the Bible. They sang psalms and hymns. One key part of the reformation of worship was church music. From the Reformation, we receive a treasure trove of church music. The Reformers believe in congregational singing. Martin Luther said that music was second to theology, signifying the importance of music in worship.

Music in worship is still important. The difference is that in the past, it was the church which influenced the popular culture; the best music and art were inspired by the Christian faith (Example: Handel's *Messiah*, Saint-Saëns' *Samson and Delilah*, etc.). Today, the reverse is true; it is the popular culture that has impacted the church and its music. David Wells, in his book *No Place for Truth*, says that the popular culture (including its music) is not neutral, and he warns against taking the culture in general and its music specifically as "a partner amenable to being co-opted in the cause of celebrating Christian truth."

The Session has recently adopted a music policy for Calvary Bible-Presbyterian Church. The purpose is to establish biblical principles for the music for our church. I reproduce for you – in two parts – the music policy for Calvary BP Church; today the philosophy of our music policy, and God willing next week, the practice of the policy.

### **introduction: music in the church**

God is the Creator. Together with His creation, He also created sounds and music. There is no new sound that can be invented by men. David said that it was God who put a new song in his mouth (Ps. 40:3); the implication that there was an old song before his conversion. The new song is the song of the redeemed person.

It is natural for the joyful heart to sing; there is no song greater than the song of salvation, no message greater than the message of redemption; no One more worthy of our praises than our blessed Saviour.

In the Old Testament, the worship of God was always accompanied by music. The Book of Psalms is the national hymnal of Israel. David, the man of God (Neh 12:36) is also a composer of songs, and inventor of musical instruments (Neh 12:36; 1 Chron 23:5; 2 Chron 7:6; 29:26; Amos 6:5). David also organised the Levites into musicians and singers (1 Chron. 15:16) to provide music for the worship of God.

In the New Testament, music was also used in worship. In the Gospel of Mark, we read that our Lord Jesus and His disciples sang a hymn as they went out into the Mount of Olives (Mark 14:26). The Apostle Paul encourages us to admonish “*one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord*” (Col 3:16; Eph 5:19). Paul also advises us to “*sing with the spirit, and...with the understanding also*”(1 Cor 14:15).

In history, the church had been the patron of the arts including music. Much of classical music was sponsored by the church. However, under the Roman Catholic Church, church music was strictly limited to the clergy. Only priests and nuns sang; the worshippers merely listened. In other words, they were deprived of the opportunity to praise God. The 16<sup>th</sup> Reformation which returned the Bible back to the people also restored congregational singing. The greatest revivals in church history are often accompanied by the compositions of hymns. The great preachers of the Gospel often partnered with great hymn-writers. Example: D.L. Moody and Ira Sankey. John Wesley and his brother Charles.

All things are created good, it is depraved men that pervert the good; and so it is in music. The instrument of music which is meant to praise God is now used to promote men; it is used to draw sinners to the Saviour, but now it is used to make the sinners feel good.

Music is vital to the Gospel ministry and the life of Calvary Bible-Presbyterian Church (CBPC). However, with the great variety of music styles, we at CBPC must therefore be spiritually discerning in choosing the music for our church. In carrying out the music ministry, we believe that the Bible is the “Word of God, the Supreme and final authority of faith and life.” Accordingly, we at CBPC believe that the philosophy of our music ministry must also be derived from principles set forth in Holy Scripture.

### **The Philosophy of CBPC’s Music Ministry**

We believe that music is a gift from God ordained for the purpose of glorifying Him. Throughout the Bible, the redeemed are repeatedly exhorted to express our love for and worship of God in songs (Psalms 13:6; 30:4; 33:2-3; 57:9; 66:4; 68:4, 32; 71:23; 95:1; 96:1-2; 98:1, 5; 104:33; 105:2; 147:7; 149:1; Isaiah 12:5; 42:10; Jeremiah 20:13; Romans 15:9). For the purpose of this policy paper, we will consider Psalm 40:1-3.

*I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.*

*He brought me up also out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings.*

*And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD.*

From this portion of Scripture, we note the following:

1. The Music in CBPC Must Extol God and His salvation

The psalmist sings because God had delivered him out of the miry clay, and set his feet upon a rock. The primary purpose of music in CBPC is to praise and worship God for Who He is (our sovereign God and Creator) and what He has done (our loving Saviour). As such we sing unto our Lord alone, and Christ is the theme of our songs.

#### 2. The Music in CBPC Must be Rendered by the Redeemed

The Psalmist sings because he has been delivered. We believe that no man can sing of God's saving grace without having a personal experience of that grace. As such, we believe that our music ministry is best accomplished by the redeemed. While we recognise that the world has its offerings of musical talents, the music at CBPC is entirely rendered by our church family.

#### 3. The Music in CBPC Must Bear a Definite Distinction from that of the World

It is interesting to note that the phrase "horrible pit" (Psalm 40:2) describes a pit of noise. Perhaps the Psalmist had in mind the noise that Moses heard as he came down from Mount Sinai – the noise of worldliness and idolatry.

At CBPC, we believe that when God saved us, He also saved us from the world's music, and we have no desire to adopt the musical genres and styles of the world in our church services. Just as it is inconceivable that church music would be heard in a dancehall, it should be equally inconceivable for worldly music to be heard in the church.

At CBPC, we are aware of the great variety of Christian music that is available in the market. While we do not want to judge the musical choices of others, we believe that church music that honours God must bear a clear distinction from the world's music in its style, lyrics, and presentation.

#### 4. The Music in CBPC Must be Dynamic

By being dynamic in our music, we do not mean loudness by which a song is sung; loud singing does not necessarily mean good singing; conversely singing loudly to the extent of shouting shows a lack of temperance. Being dynamic also does not mean a heavy and choppy rhythm, like some of John Philip Sousa's marches. Being dynamic also does not mean an uncontrolled fervour to the extent that one is carried away by the song and to be oblivious of the occasion, which is worship.

Being dynamic means that we at CBPC are not static in our music choices. We do not just sing from the church hymnal. The Psalmist says that God "*hath put a new song in [his] mouth*" (Psalm 40:3). The "new song" is not a reference to songs that have been recently composed or have the contemporary/modern sound. The "new song" is a reference to the song that the Psalmist now sings in contrast to the "old songs" that he used to sing before he was saved. It is a "new song" of salvation. It is a "new song" of the redeemed.

Having said that, it does not mean that we reject all spiritual songs that have been written by composers who are still living. There is great value in the old hymns. There is also great value in some recent ones. We recognise that God continues to work through the talents that He has given to His people to produce music that is both biblically sound

and spiritually edifying. At CBPC, we will strive to be dynamic in our music ministry by introducing new compositions when they meet the biblical principles

#### 5. The Music in CBPC is an Offering to God

At CBPC, we believe in making a joyful noise unto the Lord (Psalm 66:1). Just as we avoid the musical styles of the world, we would also strive to avoid the secular way of music presentation. As such, we render our music in a way that would honour God and not the musicians.

It is interesting to note that the Psalmist says that when his new song is rendered, "*many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord*" (Psalm 40:3).

The Psalmist understood that music presentation is a seeing art as much as it is a hearing art. At CBPC, we ask ourselves, what do the people "see" when they hear the music in church? And when the people have seen and heard the music, do they fear and trust in the Lord?

Music as a sacrifice to God also means that we strive to serve with the best of our abilities. The Bible refers to the "sacrifice of praise" (Jer 33:11; Heb 13:15). Any sacrifice made to God must be the best. God-honouring music under-rehearsed and badly and slothfully performed is just as bad as music that dishonours God. While we are not professionals, we strive to do our best for our Lord and Saviour.

#### 6. The Music in CBPC Seeks to Edify the Faith of the Worshipers

The Word of God exhort the believers to "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Col 3:16).

In other words, the music presented at CBPC must serve to reinforce spiritual truth. We recognise that there are hymns that teach a particular spiritual truth (e.g. Immortal, Invisible, God only Wise); there are also hymns that serve to warn us against sin (e.g. Yield Not to Temptation); yet there are others that remind us of God's promises and encourage us in the Christian walk (e.g. Does Jesus Care?).

We also recognise that the lyrics of some hymns are taken from Holy Scripture (e.g. The Lord is My Shepherd), and there are also songs of testimony of what God has done in our lives (e.g. Love Lifted Me). At CBPC, we strive to include all these types of songs and keep them in balance.

God willing, we will continue next week.

16 Nov 08

As 2008 draws to a close, there will be a flurry of activities coming up in the last weeks of November and December. Below is a list of activities and special events so that you pray for them and also to attend.

- 21-23 Nov – Choir Mission trip to Evangel BPC in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- \* 26 Nov – 2 Dec – Mission trip to North Thailand led by Eld Mak
- \* **29 Nov (3-5pm) – Combined Church Seminar at Moriah BPC. Dr Scott Pearson will be speaking on “The Lessons and Legacies of the Protestant Reformation in a Post-Modern Era”**
- \* 2-5 Dec – English Junior Camp for children from Primary 3 to 6
- \* 7 Dec (10:00am, 4:00pm) – Baptismal Sunday
- \* **8 Dec (10:00am) – Awana Leaders’ Training**
- \* 8-9 Dec – Mandarin Young Adults’ Camp
- \* 8-13 Dec – English Youth Fellowship Camp
- \* 15-18 Dec – Mandarin Junior Camp
- \* 17-20 Dec – Mandarin Youth Fellowship Camp
- \* **20 Dec (5:30pm) – Carols Alive!**
- \* 21 Dec (10:00am) – Christmas Sunday
- \* 21 Dec (11:30am) – Hokkien Worship Service Christmas Gospel Meeting
- \* **24 Dec (7:30pm) – Christmas Praise Service**
- \* **25 Dec (4:00pm) – Mandarin Christmas Service**
- \* **31 Dec (8:15pm) – Combined Year End Service**
  
- \* 4 Jan 2009 (10:00am) – 36<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Calvary BPC and Dedication Sunday

For those who are new to our church, let me draw your attention to some of these events. **Awana Leaders’ Training** (8 Dec, 10:00am). The Awana Club is a children’s ministry held every Saturday afternoon from 3:25-5:00pm during the school year. Every Saturday afternoon, there are about 70 children who come to our church. The programme consists of a Bible story, Scripture memorisation and games. If you want to invest your time wisely, invest them in the spiritual training of children. Please come for this training session.

**Carols Alive!** (20 Dec, 5:30pm) is our annual combined Fellowship and Bible Study Groups gathering. The evening begins with a singing of Christmas carols followed by dinner and ends with testimonies of God’s people and more carols. The English and Mandarin congregations have fellowship groups that cater to every age group. If you do not have a fellowship group, please join one that is suitable for you.

The church also has many Bible study groups that meet throughout the week in members' homes. If you are interested in joining a Bible study group, come to *Carols Alive!* Here is where you will meet the various Bible study leaders.

**Christmas Praise Service** (24 Dec, 7:30pm). There will be something special for our Christmas Praise Service this year. The church choir will be presenting a new cantata by Joseph Martin titled *Season of Wonders*, and for the first time, they will be accompanied by a string and wind ensemble. The Mandarin Congregation will be celebrating their Christmas on 25 December at 4:00pm. If you have Mandarin speaking friends and neighbours, bring them along to the Christmas Day Service.

**Year End Service** (31 Dec, 8:15pm). The English and Mandarin congregations will be coming together to praise God for His blessings for 2008. The Lord's Supper will be served. Spend the last hours of 2008 in God's house.

### **Calvary BPC's Music Policy (Part II)**

Last Lord's Day, we published the philosophy of Calvary BPC's music ministry. The key points are that the music in our church must...

1. *Extol God and His salvation.*
2. *Be rendered by the redeemed.*
3. *Bear a definite distinction from that of the World.*
4. *Be dynamic in the sense that we will introduce new compositions when they meet the biblical principles.*
5. *Be an offering to God so we will strive to give our best.*
6. *Seek to edify the faith of the worshippers.*

Today, we published the rest of the Music Policy which deals mainly with the practice and implementation of our church's music policy.

#### 1. The Congregation

Our Lord Jesus said, "true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him." (John 4:23). In other words, worship as God desires it brings us into His presence; it's meant not to be passive but participative.

A church without a choir can and must still sing. In this regard, we acknowledge that the congregation is the first and most important choir in CBPC. Congregational singing is absolutely essential for worship, and dynamic congregational singing is a reflection of a believer's attitude in worship.

To aid in the congregation in its worship, it is important to have the text of the hymns draw us to the same truth as the sermon and the rest of the worship service. In this regard, the worship leader must, with prayerful consideration, choose hymns that are appropriate to the sermon topic. Wise selection of hymns would also involve careful consideration of both the text and the music.



## 2. The Church Musicians

The music ministry in CBPC is to be presented by members and regular worshippers of the church. Besides the organ and piano, we would like to see members who are proficient in a musical instrument to render items of praise during the worship service.

At CBPC, we recognise that more important than musical ability is a whole-hearted service to God. We do not insist that all music presented at CBPC be of similar quality to those performed by professional musicians. But at the same time, inadequately prepared and poorly performed music hinders the worship service. So, at CBPC, we encourage all musicians to be faithful and to serve God to the best of their abilities, and to offer their music as “sacrifices of praise” unto God.

In this regard, I personally find applause completely out of place in corporate worship. We serve as unto God and not unto men. Anytime the worshipper’s attention is drawn away from God and to the performer, the musician and the congregation rob God of His glory.

## 3. The Choirs

The church choir is made up of members and regular worshippers of CBPC. The church choir has an important place in CBPC because it is an avenue of service for our people. We are not professional singers, and reading music is not a requirement; however, we do insist that the choir members be faithful and committed.

## 4. The Children

Because praise and music is important to God, our children need to experience and learn the joy of worship through hymns and spiritual songs. At CBPC, we strive to make music a major part of our children’s ministry.

By the grace of God, we pray that the music that is rendered to God in our church will stand out not just because of the skills of the musicians or the voices of the choirs, but that our music stands out because it is rendered by a thankful people to our God, Who alone is worthy to be praised.

23 Nov 08

Last Saturday (15 Nov), the Awana Club ended 2008 with an open house for the clubbers and their parents. Calvary BPC started the Awana programme in 1991, and it has been a fruitful outreach to the children and their families. At present, the Awana Club has several groups – Cubbies, Sparkies, and Truth and Training. We praise God for sending to us some 70 children every Saturday afternoon. We thank God also for the many who serve in this ministry. However, we need more help. There will be an Awana Club training and induction programme on 8 December at 9:30am. If you can spare three hours on Saturday afternoon, please come for the meeting on 8 December.

Every Thursday afternoon at 2:30pm, there is a group of 20-30 people who gather together for prayer. This is the Agape Prayer Fellowship, which began several years ago. Last Thursday we had a prayer retreat during which the people shared testimonies of how God had worked in their lives. The Agape Prayer Fellowship is open to all; if you have the time, please come and join us.

Since July, we have been dealing with the issue of biblical worship, which is God's means of grace for us, meaning to say that worship is ordained and ordered by God for our spiritual good. God's care for us is rarely seen in the extraordinary means of miracles and wonders; rather it is seen in the ordinary providence such as daily Bible reading and prayer, and corporate worship. However, this begs the question – Is there only one way of worship that is biblical? The answer is no. The Westminster Confession of Faith tells us that there are some things which are “expressly set down in Scripture,” and there are also things which, “by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture” (WCF, Chapter 1.6). The circumstances may change but not the elements of worship and certainly not the attitude of our worship.

### **What is True Worship?**

A good friend of mine says that when he comes to our church, it is like travelling back in time because the sermons are just as long and the hymns are just as old.

Those who are partial toward a more contemporary style of worship also claim that the style of worship is determined by the culture of the day. After all, the Reformers introduced new hymns, which at that time were contemporary. So perhaps we have to ask ourselves, “Why do we worship the way we do, or are we just being narrow-minded and old-fashioned when our worship seems like it dates back to the 1600's?”

This line of argument does not discriminate between the changes that came about in the church as a result of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Reformation and the changes we see in the worship styles today. The character of the change is radically different. In the Protestant Reformation, it was reform according to the Word of God to bring the church into conformity with scriptural principles. No one can say the change to move toward contemporary worship is made for the same reason.

A second argument for contemporary worship is that they attract more people. This argument is based on the idea that the bigger the size of the church, the better must be its worship. However, we know the numbers game cannot be used for determining truth and rightness. The church is not run by majority opinion but by the Word of God. However, this is not to say that small is always right and better. As ambassadors for our Lord Jesus, we must always pray that our worship and our attitude must reflect our Saviour, and we must not do anything that deliberately builds barriers between us and the world so that we may appear to be orthodox.

There are also others who say that worship is determined by the sincerity of the worshipper. We have seen from Holy Scripture that the worshipper's sincerity is never a good reason for violating God's explicit command. Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, were struck down for offering strange fire before God (Lev 10). Uzzah was also struck dead for trying to stabilise the ark of the covenant as it was being transported back to Jerusalem (2 Sam 6). Uzzah's sincerity and good intentions did not spare him God's judgment. Fervour, sincerity, joyful and blessed experiences do not define true worship.

Thus in our worship, we must exercise discernment. We must look beyond the surface and ask some questions: Are we worshipping according to the Word of God? Does our worship reflect the nature and character of God? Can we say that we have been faithful and obedient to the Scripture in all areas of life including worship?

## **Biblical Worship**

What is biblical worship? Biblical worship will be the one that conforms to the Word of God. We worship the way we do because of our biblical convictions and our understanding of Holy Scripture. Over the last few months, we have defined what biblical worship is. Let me restate for you.

- Biblical worship must be founded on the Word of God.
- Biblical worship must be theocentric (God-centred). God is the object of our worship, and the glory of God must be our goal in worship.
- Biblical worship must be a dialogue between God and us. He speaks through His inspired Word, and we respond in prayers, praises and confession.
- Biblical worship must be simple. We do not need the extra trappings of candles, vestments, statues, etc, to help us in our worship.
- Biblical worship must be a means of grace. Worship is God's ordained way for believers to grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- Biblical worship must be participatory. We are not merely passive audience in a worship service. We are active participants. We sing. We pray. We read Scripture. We listen to the sermon.
- Biblical worship must be anticipatory. We worship a risen Saviour who promised that He will come back again. As such, the Lord's Day worship is a foretaste of our eternity with our Lord Jesus.

## **Final Word**

We have to remind ourselves that we need to be humble to allow for differences of opinion in other people. That they worship differently from us does not mean that they are not Christians. We must never allow our orthodoxy to turn into spiritual pride.

On our part, we must be vigilant. There is a tendency that we continue to do the same thing the same way because that is the way that we have been doing it for the last 30 years. Our children must know the reasons for the way we worship. Parents have the duty to teach them. Or else, years down the road and as our Lord tarries in His return, they could be worshipping the same as we do, but they do not know the biblical bases underlying our worship. Not knowing the reason for our worship is really no better than just superstitious ritualism.

True orthodoxy is not stubbornly holding fast to the old and rejecting everything that is new. True orthodoxy is always striving to make the Word of God central and Christ pre-eminent in our lives. True orthodox worship is when our hearts and our minds are engaged in praising and glorifying God, and our lives reflect that humbling privilege.

NB. Recently, several controversial issues have been on the headlines of our local newspapers. These biomedical issues – euthanasia, organ transplant, AMD (advanced medical directive) etc. involve not just medical science but also ethics. God willing, for the next few pastoral letters, we will be looking at what the Bible has to say on these issues.

30 Nov 08

On 21 November (Friday), our Church Choir from the English congregation headed for Petaling Jaya, Malaysia to minister at Evangel BP Church. A bus load of 36 choir members, some with their families, and others who drove and flew presented a Christmas Cantata – *The Season of Wonders* – on 22 November (Saturday). The Evangel BPC rented a special hall for the occasion. The presentation was part of a Gospel Rally aimed at bringing the meaning of Christmas to nearly 100 guests.

The evening began with an energetic singspiration led by Elder (Dr) Lim Yew Cheng. Then Sister Choon Fong and her children – two sons on the violin and daughter on the cello presented a medley of Christmas songs. Choon Fong also later presented two solos. This was followed by the choir and a short message. The cantata and the message tied in nicely with the overall theme which is the gift of Christmas.

Elder Lim summed it up well when he said that we had done our part by sowing the Gospel seed. The rest we would have to leave it to the Holy Spirit to bring in the fruits in due time and according to God's sovereign will.

On 23 November, the Choir presented two other praise items to a packed house in Evangel BPC. Though the size of the congregation at Evangel BPC is small, we were touched by the faithfulness, zeal and hospitality. The choir left for home after a luncheon hosted by Evangel BPC. In a sense, this is the choir's "international" debut, and we pray that God will continue to use the choir to bring God's joy and His truth through their hymns and spiritual songs.

I would also encourage members and friends who are travelling in or around KL to support our brethren in Evangel BPC by your visit. The address is 26 Damansara Jaya, SS21/22. Tel: 6012-2966-366. E-mail: [evangelbpc@gmail.com](mailto:evangelbpc@gmail.com).

Over the next few weeks, God willing, we will be examining through the lens of Holy Scripture certain social and biomedical issues that have been on the headlines of the local news media. Some of these issues include financial compensation for organ donors, euthanasia, organ farming, advanced medical directive (AMD), and the use of animal organs in man.

Issues that concerned the health and life are sensitive because they touch the very heart and soul of people at a time when their emotions are vulnerable. We should never underestimate or even pretend to know the pain, suffering, struggles and anguish of those who are stricken with such debilitating diseases and their caregivers.

However, we must also be careful that in seeking answers and solutions to these difficult and heart-wrenching problems, we do not violate the principles of Holy Scripture and in the process demean the sanctity of life. As Christians, we have to examine the proposed solutions not merely for their legality or viability; just because an act is legally sanctioned by the State does not mean that it is right, and just because a

solution is effective also does not mean that it is moral. Christians have to go to the Word of God and determine whether the proposed solutions are in line with the Bible's teachings.

In July 2008, a prominent local businessman was fined S\$17,000 and jailed one day for attempting to buy a kidney illegally for \$300,000. As it turned out, the man's action and motivations were too progressive for Singapore, but only by a few months. How fast the legal wheels turn in Singapore when driven by utilitarianism and pragmatism.

The Human Organ Transplant Act (HOTA) will be amended early next year to allow people who donate their kidneys to get monetary compensation directly from the recipient or a voluntary organisation. To prevent any potential exploitation of the poor, the Health Minister Khaw Boon Wan said that the amount of compensation should not be so large that it would be seen as an inducement. The National Kidney Foundation (NKF) similarly says that the donor must not be better off as a result of giving up one of his kidney, but he must also not be any worse off. The suggested figure for what is deemed a non-inducing compensation is at least five figures and possibly six.

The proposed amendments to HOTA also change with regard to whom the laws may apply. On 12 November, Mr Khaw said that the focus will first be on Singaporeans. He said, "My interest is Singaporean patients and making sure that we can increase the transplant rate in an...ethically compatible manner." On 15 November, he added that foreigners who come to Singapore to donate their organs should also be compensated.

All compensations will be worked out by an ethics committee working within an ethical framework to ensure that there are no undue pressure on the "donor" and no covert under-the-table payments.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The people who support the monetary compensation for organ donors argue that it is the most effective solution to the problem of shortage of organs available for transplantation.

This is a purely utilitarian free-market approach to the problem. There is a demand and supply problem. There are people who need organs, and there are people who want to donate organs. The assumption is that the loss of income and potential health risks as a result of the medical procedure are the major factors holding donors from coming forward. So the proposed HOTA amendment is to ensure that the organ donor does not suffer financial loss for his altruistic act.

From a strictly utilitarian standpoint, this solution of compensating willing donors is arguably the most effective and quickest way to resolve the shortage of organs for transplantation. But, should life's problems – and life itself – be approached from such a purely utilitarian basis. Is the utilitarian approach the only way or is it the most convenient way?

What about altruism? Dr Gary S Becker, professor of Economics and of Sociology at the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business, plainly states that altruism is not “sufficiently powerful” enough to ensure the supply of organs that are needed to meet the demand for organs. Thus, he argues that laws should be changed “so that organs could be purchased and sold, some people would give not out of altruism, but for the financial gain” (<http://www.chicagogsb.edu/capideas/apr06/1.aspx>).

There are others who see no contradiction between selling of organs and altruism, arguing that the move to compensate donors would not diminish the virtue of altruism. However, one need only to ask, if a person can be compensated something, would he give the thing for free. There is no way to tell whether monetary compensation for organ would actually diminish the spirit of altruism, but it is certain that it would not help promote it.

On the question that the poor might be exploited, those who argue for monetary compensation for organ donors say that the amount of compensation would not be so high as to serve as an inducement. What constitutes an inducement is purely subjective. A six-figure amount may not be an inducement to some, but to another, it is. And to foreigners, a six-figure compensation may well be the money that they would get from a life-time of labour.

One good comparison is to look at the number of foreign workers in Singapore. They were induced to leave home and country to take up jobs at wages that few Singaporeans would do. The wages are not a high enough inducement to Singaporeans, but they are certainly an inducement to the foreigners. So while there have been assurances that the amount of compensation would not be an inducement, it is fair to assume that it is the poor who are more likely to donate their organs.

Those who are for monetary compensation for organ donors also discount the possibility of coercion of donors, saying that the decision to donate rests solely on the donor. This is tantamount to saying that the uneducated grandmothers who lost their life savings in minibonds should never be compensated because they invested in those bonds willingly.

The fact that a person has the autonomy to make a decision does not mean that the decision will be a good and informed one. There may be extenuating circumstances that “coerced” a person into agreeing to donate his/her organ. Again, we need to ask the question: apart from donors who are giving their organs to their relatives, what are the people who are most likely to donate their organs for monetary compensation? And one should not be as callous as Dr Becker whose retort to the potential exploitation of the poor is, “why would poor donors be better off if this option [of selling their organs] were taken away from them?”

## **Biblical Considerations**

By amending HOTA to allow for the legal monetary compensation of organ donors removes the stigma of treating human organs as commodities to be sold on the black market as if they were just pieces of meat. Changing the terminology “sale” of organs to “monetary compensation,” also takes away a great deal out of any discussion with regard to the morality of the very act itself. Generally speaking, what is legal in the eyes of society is also deemed as moral. However, as Christians we have to be reminded that while man may do what is legally right in his own eyes, it not necessarily biblically or morally right in the eyes of God.

As Christians, we believe that the Bible is the standard for our life and practice. We believe that the Bible is authoritative in every aspect of our life, and we believe that biblical ethics is Bible-based morality.

The Bible does not directly address the issue of organ transplantation, but we can apply what it says in 1 John 3:16, “*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.*” The ultimate act of altruism is to lay down one’s life for the brethren. Donating an organ can be classified under that act of laying down one’s life for the brethren. However, the act is voluntary with no monetary compensation whatsoever. No one should be coerced or induced into such donating part of himself.

The Bible does not teach physical well being as an entitlement. “*A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things [and that includes health] which he possesseth*” (Luke 12:15). Sickness and pain is part of life. “*Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward*” (Job 5:7).

The world is concerned with the quality of a man’s life, and that becomes the basis for the reasoning that all human suffering is bad and must be avoided at all costs. Thus the rich businessman who is suffering from renal disease defines quality of life as having a kidney transplant. So he buys one from a poor man, who defines his quality of life as having more money so that he can have a better standard of living. Those who argue that monetary compensation for organs would not exploit the poor need to ask why the businessman did not ask his relatives to sell him one of their kidneys.

The “quality of life” is a poor indicator for living. Besides, the quality of life opens up a whole new can of worms: Who determines the quality of life? Who determines who should have quality of life? To what extent can we go to achieve that quality of life?

The Bible teaches the sanctity of life – the respect for human life. “*Thou shalt not kill*”(Exodus 20:13) also implies that one must also seek to preserve the life of another. And no Christian should put another person in harm’s way so that he may have a better quality of life.

Suffering is part of life that a sovereign God gives us. The blind man was born blind so that the works of God can be manifest in him (John 9:3). Paul who had a thorn in the flesh which God did not remove even after Paul’s much praying. But our Lord Jesus said



to Paul, *“My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.”* And Paul humbly submitted, *“Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me”* (2 Corinthians 12:9).

There are no easy answers to these complex problems. As a society and as individuals we must be careful not to take the easy way out by adopting a utilitarian approach lest we find ourselves on the slippery road to more moral dilemmas.

07 Dec 08

This morning, we welcome new members to our church. Membership in the local church is a biblical injunction. The Bible exhorts us not to forsake *“the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching”* (Heb 10:25). We see this also in the way the Apostles compare the church – the body of believers – to the physical human 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”* (Rom 12:4-5). *“For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ”* (1 Cor 12:12).

Church membership comes with responsibilities. I pray that in the days ahead, the new members will find an area of ministry in which they can serve God and co-labour with others, and together we may advance the cause of the Gospel.

We are currently dealing with certain controversial health and medical issues in our weekly pastoral letter. The topic is Advanced Medical Directive (AMD).

### **What is an AMD?**

In the Singapore context, the AMD (also called a living will) is a legal document signed by a person in advance to indicate that he does not wish to have any extraordinary life-sustaining treatment to prolong his life in the event if he becomes terminally ill and unconscious. The AMD specifies the person who will make the health care decisions for him when he can no longer make those decisions for himself.

In Singapore, making an AMD is a voluntary decision. Anyone who is 21 years old and above, and of sound mind can make an AMD in the presence of two witnesses, one of which must be a medical doctor.

The Ministry of Health states clearly that the AMD is not euthanasia, which the MOH defines as the “deliberate ending of the life of a person suffering from an incurable and painful disease by unnatural means” ([http://www.pqms.moh.gov.sg/apps/fcd\\_faqlmain](http://www.pqms.moh.gov.sg/apps/fcd_faqlmain)).

The difference between euthanasia and AMD is the former is to deliberately terminate a life, whereas the latter is to allow the “dying process take its natural course” when a person becomes terminally ill and unconscious.

So far, only 10,000 Singaporeans have made a living will since the AMD came into effect 11 years ago. Due to the poor response to the AMD, the Singapore government is planning to simplify the AMD application process by dropping the requirement that one of the witnesses be a doctor.

### **Dying with Dignity?**

The Psalmist says, *“My times are in thy hand”* (Psalm 31:15a). On matters concerning life and death, we must be careful that we do not overstep the bounds and intrude into the sovereignty of God and justify that intrusion by ideas such as “dying with dignity” and “it is a man’s right to choose when and how he should die.”

We must not be too callous about life and death decisions. The AMD is touted to have practical benefits. But we have to consider, what are the practical benefits, and for whom? The argument is that it is a waste of money to keep a terminally ill/comatose patient alive. The practical benefit in this case is purely financial for the family of the sick person and not the sick person himself.

The idea of “dying with dignity” received far too much hype. In 1990, Terri Schiavo entered a vegetative state in 1990, and she remained in this persistent vegetative state for fifteen years until her husband, Michael Schiavo, said that it was Terry’s desire not to be kept alive by machines. Meanwhile, Michael had been living with another woman with whom he had two children. But he refused to divorce Terri because by doing so he would have lost the right to determine the course of her treatment. Terri’s parents were willing to care for their daughter. The courts, however, gave Michael the right to stop Terri’s life support. Who benefitted by this decision? After the feeding tube was removed, Terri eventually died of dehydration 13 days later. Is this “dying with dignity”?

Commenting on this tragedy, the New England Journal of Medicine writes, “In considering such profound decisions, the central issue is not what family members would want for themselves or what they want for their incapacitated loved one, but rather what the patient would want for himself or herself...If the data about the patient’s wishes are not clear, then in the absence of public policy or family consensus, we should err on the side of continued treatment even in cases of a persistent vegetative state in which there is no hope of recovery. But if the evidence is clear...then enforcing life-prolonging treatment against what is agreed to be the patient’s will is both unethical and illegal.” (Quill, Timothy E., “Terri Schiavo – A Tragedy Compounded,” NEJM, 21 April 2005).

## **Death’s Defeat**

The Bible teaches that death is the result of sin. *“By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned”* (Rom 5:12). There is nothing dignified about dying. Death is a reminder of the depravity of man.

To Christians, death lost its sting because of the hope that we have in and through Christ. *“For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many...For if by one man’s offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.) Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall*

*many be made righteous. Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 5:15-21).*

While it is true that our life is in God’s hands, we must also recognize that the Bible does not command us to do everything we can to keep a person alive. If an unconscious person is being kept alive only by machines, I believe that it is not immoral to turn off the machines and allow the person to die.

I was with an elder in Vancouver BP Church when he made the decision to turn off the life support machine that kept his comatose wife alive. She suffered bone cancer. It was not an easy decision, and it should never be.

I support the AMD. I think it is a good thing to state the kind and extent of treatment you would wish to have before you come to the stage when you can no longer make your wishes known. With the AMD, it will also save your loved ones the anguish of having to make these heart-wrenching decisions on your behalf.

While I support the AMD, I do not think we should we should make it easier for people to sign up. This is a major decision and we should not diminish its importance by dispensing the requirement of trained professionals, such as doctors as witnesses.

We should never seek to end a life prematurely; neither should we seek to prolong life as long as possible. If the decision has to be made, it must be for the interest of the person, and for the glory of God for “precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints” (Psalm 116:15).

14 Dec 08

Over the last two weeks, two events hogged the headlines of our local newspapers: the terrorist attacks in Mumbai, India, and the chaos at the international airport in Bangkok, Thailand.

In Mumbai, terrorists staged multiple attacks in India's financial district, bombing hospitals, hotels, railway stations; injuring over 300 people and killing over 180 people, including a Singaporean. The Indian police said that the terrorists did not spare women and children. The only surviving terrorist said that their goal was to kill 5,000 people, and he was ordered to kill "until the last breath." The Mumbai massacre is aptly described by some as India's 9-11.

In Bangkok, thousands of anti-government protestors took over the Suvarnabhumi and Don Muang international airports, bringing the country's air travel to a standstill. The eight-day occupation left hundreds of thousands of passengers stranded.

Both situations in Mumbai and Bangkok pointed to one thing – the increasing lawlessness in our society. What we have seen and heard in Mumbai is a total disregard for life. What we have witnessed in Bangkok is a total disregard for rule of the law, a situation where man does what is right in his own eyes.

The Bible has warned us "*that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient [Gk: a-peithes] to parents, unthankful [a-charistos], unholy [a-nosios], without natural affection [a-storgos], trucebreakers [a-spondos], false accusers, incontinent [a-krates], fierce [a-nemeros], despisers of those that are good [a-philagathos], traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God*" (2 Tim 3:1-4). The prefix "a" is a negative participle. For example, to have affection for someone is *stergo*; to have no natural affection is *astorgos*.

We see the same kind of wicked attitude in Christian homes, where boundaries of morality are increasingly being blurred, where parental authority is being challenged, where children are disobedient to parents.

We see it in churches, where biblical precepts are set aside for expediency, where people knowingly and willingly join a Reformed church that subscribes to the doctrines and practices spelled out in the Westminster Confession of Faith and then later rise up to generate strife and create trouble.

We see the same in ordained men who have no qualms distorting truth, twisting facts, disseminating half-truths, and telling outright lies from the pulpit. And they preached with faces crimson with fury and voices quivering, and all in the name of contending and defending the faith. But can the work of God be done with the methods of the devil, who is the father of lies? Does the end of contending the faith sanction all means, even unbiblical ones? Never!

The Apostle Paul says that we must strive for excellence. But the man who strives for masteries is “not crowned, except he strive lawfully” (2 Tim 2:5). In other words, we cannot do wrong in order to do right. And we cannot do wrong even for noble causes. In the Gospel ministry, the ends never justify the means. We must not only do right, but we must also do the right things the right way. “*Let not...your good be evil spoken of*” (Rom 14:16).

The philosophy of ends justifying the means comes by various names. It is utilitarianism, pragmatism, situational ethics. These are merely different shades of the same idea. Jeremy Bentham, one of the chief proponents of utilitarianism, says that man is controlled by two masters – pain and pleasure. And Bentham says that they are the bases for our moral choices. “It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne. They govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think.”

That is the philosophical basis for justifying the sale of organs for monetary gain. That is the basis for pushing for euthanasia. The problem with using utilitarianism as a basis for making life and death choices is that man’s judgments in these matters are not infallible. Doctors do make mistakes, and misdiagnose. They do make wrong judgments. Below is a case in point.

Nathanael Lee was born a healthy and normal baby on 22 September 2004. When he was five months old, his parents brought him to a doctor, and during consultation, he noticed that Nathanael was having seizures. The doctor’s diagnosis was that Nathanael was suffering from “infantile spasm.” Further consultations with specialists gave the parents not a glimmer of hope. The doctors say that there is no cure, and that Nathanael would not survive for long. In other words, no hope. The utilitarian would say, “There is only pain for Nathanael, and anguish for the parents, so why try?”

Nathanael’s parents are faithful Christians. They prayed and they worked. They never gave up. Nathanael was put on a special diet for two years. He had to be strapped to a contraption that would put him upright in a standing position daily. In January 2007, an EEG was done and the doctors pronounced Nathanael seizure free.

By November 2008, Nathanael was learning to walk with a bit of assistance. Next month (January 2009), Nathanael will be enrolled in a school. The Agape Prayer Fellowship (which meets every Thursday afternoon) has been praying for Nathanael. His parents write, “We are continually praying for his speech. And we trust that in God’s perfect timing, it will come to pass. We thank God for this miraculous healing, and now we need to continue to work on Nathanael’s ongoing development. Thank you for your prayer and support, and continue to pray along with us. Please thank all Calvary Bible-Presbyterian Church members for persevering together with us. Our God is a truly prayer answering God. ‘For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon

me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart' (Jer 29:11-13).”

May the Lord grant us faith to trust Him, humility to follow Him, and hold fast to Him even when we fear our faith would fail.

21 Dec 08  
God my Saviour

The last week (8-13 December) had been a very busy week. On Monday morning (8 December), a public holiday, three different groups met in church. They were the Young Adults Fellowship from the Mandarin Congregation, here for their two-day retreat. On the same day, over 30 people turned up for the Awana Leaders' Training. The Awana Club still needs more leaders and helpers. Those who are able and willing, there is a place of ministry for you in the Awana Club.

Monday (8 December) was also the first day of the Youth Fellowship Camp. There were over 50 young people who attended the 6-day camp. Praise God for the overwhelming response. The theme of the Camp was "Living with Eternity's Values in View." It encourages my heart greatly to see Calvinians busy serving our Lord at this time of the year.

I am sure that individual families are also busy at home preparing for Christmas and the coming new year. Children who have gone overseas for studies have come home for the holidays. Working adults who are stationed abroad have also returned. And there must be a sense of excitement and joy.

The days preceding the first advent were also filled with joy. Zacharias and his wife, Elisabeth, were expecting their first born; their first and only after many year of childlessness. The angel Gabriel told Zacharias that the baby would be a boy, and that he would be called John (the grace of God). The angel also told Zacharias, "*Thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God*" (Luke 1:14-16).

The angel Gabriel also appeared to Mary, and said that she would also bear a son. His name would be Jesus (Jehovah saves), and "*He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end*" (Luke 1:32-33).

In response to these heaven-sent visitations, both Elisabeth and Mary responded with songs of praise. There was no ostentatious outburst of joy, no loud flamboyant display, but a quiet rejoicing amongst themselves concerning what God would do for and through them.

Elisabeth's song (Luke 1:42-45) is also known as the *Benediction of Elisabeth*. "*Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she*



*that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord” (Luke 1:42-45).*

This song is similar to the angel’s greeting in Luke 1:28. Sadly the words from these two passages have been misapplied and misappropriated into a Roman Catholic prayer offered in the name of Mary.

In that prayer, *“hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee”* (Luke 1:28a) is rendered in that prayer as Mary possessing exalted merits, and hence her ability to dispense divine favour. And based on the phrase, *“Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb”* (Luke 1:28c, 42b), Mary was promoted to be Mother of God, a co-mediatrix with our Lord Jesus Christ.

However, the Bible’s teaching that all man are born sinners, and are *“by nature the children of wrath”* (Ephesians 2:3). And it is only by the grace of God that we find favour with God. *“Hail, thou that art highly favoured”* is a not commendation of Mary’s self-worth; rather it is a commendation of God’s sovereign grace upon her. Likewise we deserve nothing but God’s judgment, but God, by His grace, *“wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved. In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace”* (Ephesians 1:6-7).

Mary is also said to be *“blessed...among women”* (Luke 1:28, 42). It does not mean that she was worthy of praise. It simply means that she was full of joy, and her wellspring of joy was God, from whom all blessings flow. John Calvin adds, *“If Mary's happiness, righteousness, and life, flow from the undeserved love of God, if her virtues and all her excellence are nothing more than the Divine kindness, it is the height of absurdity to tell us that we should seek from her what she derives from another quarter.”*

At this time of the year, as the shopping malls light up, and the “Sales” signs come down, there a tendency for Christians to follow the ways of the world in meaningless celebration. Rejoice we must for the Saviour of the world is come. But do not over do it with food and feasting.

Upon hearing that she was conceived with the Son of God, Mary *“arose...and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda”* to visit with Elisabeth (Luke 1:39). Elisabeth *“filled with the Holy Ghost...spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb”* (Luke 1:41-42).

Mary responded with the *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55), *“My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed...”*

The songs of Elisabeth and Mary are joyful expressions of God’s goodness upon them. Their lives were touched by God, and their hearts naturally overflowed with praises for God. May I suggest that as you visit with families and friends over Christmas to

devote sometime to share and encourage one another concerning the goodness of God in your life. As Mary said, “My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.” So rejoice, and share the joy of our Lord Jesus Christ this Christmas.

On behalf of the Church Session, I wish you and your family a blessed Christmas, and may the peace of our Lord Jesus fill your hearts and homes.

28 Dec 08

## The resolutions of Jonathan Edwards

Jonathan Edwards is one of the most important Puritan theologians in North America. He was greatly used by God to bring about the First Great Awakening – a true evangelical revival in America in 1740's. There was no secret to Edwards' effectiveness as a servant for our Lord Jesus Christ. He gave himself completely to God. One time, Edwards prayed, "I feel an ardency of soul to be...emptied and annihilated, to lie in the dust and be full of Christ alone, to love Him with a holy and pure love, to trust in Him, to live on Him, and to be perfectly sanctified and made pure with a divine and heavenly purity."

As a reminder to himself that he was not his own, but that he was redeemed by the precious blood of our Lord Jesus, Edwards composed set of guidelines for self-discipline and godly living. Edwards began his *Resolutions* when he was just about 19 years old. He wrote the first 24 in one sitting in 1722. By the end of that year, Edwards had added another 10. And over the course of the year, Edwards would add to his resolutions. He penned his last resolution on August 17, 1723. In all, there were 70 resolutions. Edwards pledged to read them once a week for the rest of his life. But more than just reading them, Edwards lived by them. You will find that these resolutions reflect the heart of a man who was well aware that he was not a finished product, but one that was still in the making. And so it is with every born-again person. The Apostle Paul acknowledged this spiritual struggle – "*For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom 7:15-24).*

The Christian life is an uphill struggle against the world and flesh, and if the final outcome is dependent upon our own strength, we all will utterly fail. But the victory is ours through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15:57). Below is an excerpt of Edwards' *Resolutions* for your edification and prayerful consideration as you begin 2009.

### **With Regard to Commitment to God**

- Resolved, that I will do whatsoever I think to be most to God's glory...in the whole of my duration, without any consideration of the time...Resolved to do whatever I think to be my duty and most for the good and advantage of mankind in general. Resolved to do this, whatever difficulties I meet with, how many soever, and how great soever. [*Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God* (1 Cor 10:31)].
- Resolved, never to do any manner of thing, whether in soul or body, less or more, but what tends to the glory of God; nor be, nor suffer it, if I can avoid it.

### **With Regard to Christian Service**

- Resolved, never to do anything but duty, and then according to Ephesians 6:6-8, to do it willingly and cheerfully as unto the Lord, and not to man: “knowing that whatever good thing any man doth, the same shall he receive of the Lord.”

### **With Regard to Prayer and Communion with God**

- Resolved, when I find those “groanings which cannot be uttered” (Rom 8:26), of which the Apostle speaks, and those “breakings of soul for the longing it hath,” of which the Psalmist speaks, Psalm 119:20, that I will promote them to the utmost of my power, and that I will not be weary of earnestly endeavoring to vent my desires, nor of the repetitions of such earnestness.
- Resolved, very much to exercise myself in this, all my life long, with the greatest openness...to declare my ways to God, and lay open my soul to him: all my sins, temptations, difficulties, sorrows, fears, hopes, desires, and every thing, and every circumstance.
- Resolved, never to count that a prayer...which is so made, that I cannot hope that God will answer it; nor that as a confession, which I cannot hope God will accept.

### **With Regard to Christian Testimony**

- On the supposition, that there...was to be but one individual in the world, at any one time, who was properly a complete Christian, in all respects...having Christianity always shining in its true luster, and appearing excellent and lovely...Resolved...[that] I strove with all my might to be that one.
- Resolved, never to give over, nor in the least to slacken, my fight with my corruptions, however unsuccessful I may be.
- Resolved, when I am most conscious of provocations to ill nature and anger, that I will strive most to feel and act good-naturedly.

### **With Regard to the Purpose of Life**

- Resolved, never to lose one moment of time; but improve it the most profitable way I possibly can.
- Resolved, to live with all my might, while I do live.
- Resolved, never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do, if it were the last hour of my life.
- Resolved, that I will live so, as I shall wish I had done when I come to die.
- Resolved, to maintain the strictest temperance, in eating and drinking.
- Resolved, to be strictly and firmly faithful to my trust.
- Resolved, to ask myself, at the end of every day, week, month and year, wherein I could possibly, in any respect, have done better.

### **With Regard to Relationships with Other People**

- Resolved, to act, in all respects, both speaking and doing, as if nobody had been so vile as I, and as if I had committed the same sins, or had the same infirmities or failings as others; and that I will let the knowledge of their failings promote nothing but shame in myself, and prove only an occasion of my confessing

my own sins and misery to God [*In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves*(Phil. 2:3)].

- Resolved, to be endeavoring to find out fit objects of charity and liberality [*It is more blessed to give than to receive* (Acts 20:35)].
- Resolved, never to do any thing out of revenge.
- Resolved, never to suffer the least motions of anger towards irrational beings.
- Resolved, never to do any thing, which if I should see in another, I should count a just occasion to despise him for, or to think any way the more meanly of him.

### **With Regard to Spiritual Growth**

- Resolved, to live so, at all times, as I think is best in my devout frames, and when I have clearest notions of things of the gospel, and another world.
- Resolved, to examine carefully, and constantly, what that one thing in me is, which causes me in the least to doubt of the love of God; and to direct all my forces against it.
- Resolved, to study the Scriptures so steadily, constantly and frequently, as that I may find, and plainly perceive myself to grow in the knowledge of the same.
- Resolved, to confess frankly to myself all that which I find in myself, either infirmity or sin; and, if it be what concerns religion, also to confess the whole case to God, and implore needed help.
- Resolved, to strive to my utmost every week to be brought higher in religion, and to a higher exercise of grace, than I was the week before.

### **With Regard to Church Membership**

- Resolved, to do always, what I can towards making, maintaining, and preserving peace, when it can be done without overbalancing detriment in other respects.
- Resolved, frequently to renew the dedication of myself to God, which was made at my baptism; which I solemnly renewed, when I was received into the communion of the church.

### **With regard to Speech**

- Resolved, not only to refrain from an air of dislike, fretfulness, and anger in conversation, but to exhibit an air of love, cheerfulness and benignity.
- Resolved, never to say any thing at all against any body, but when it is perfectly agreeable to the highest degree of Christian honor, and of love to mankind, agreeable to the lowest humility, and sense of my own faults and failings.
- Resolved, never to speak evil of anyone, so that it shall tend to his dishonor.

### **With Regard to Suffering and Fears**

- Resolved, after afflictions, to inquire, what I am the better for them, what am I the better for them, and what I might have got by them.

May our Lord Jesus grant us the strength and grace to make our lives count for God in the coming new year.

Lovingly in Christ,  
Pastor Isaac Ong

---The End---